

CRASH START



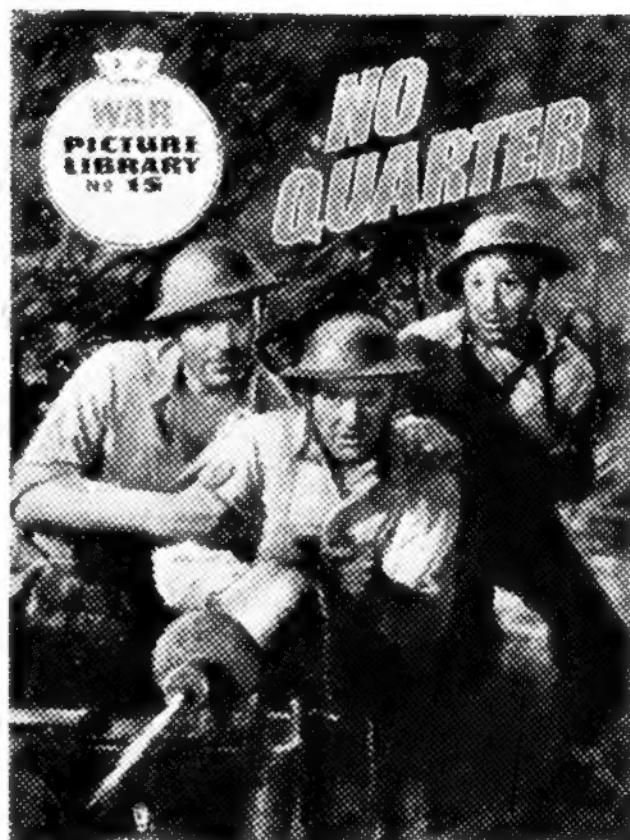
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CRASH START

TRAGIC 1940 AND THE COLLAPSE OF FRANCE BEFORE THE NAZI WAR MACHINE, MEANT TO BRITAIN NOT ONLY THE LOSS OF HER GREATEST ALLY BUT THE SURRENDER TO EXULTANT GERMANY OF THE VITAL FRENCH CHANNEL PORTS. AT ONCE AN OMINOUS SHADOW FELL ACROSS BRITAIN'S COASTAL CONVOYS WHICH NOW FELL VICTIM TO THE VICIOUS TORPEDO-PUNCHING GERMAN E-BOATS.



BRITAIN'S SWIFT ANSWER TO THIS MENACE CAME FROM THE FIERCE LITTLE BOATS OF HER OWN COASTAL FORCES -- THE MOTOR LAUNCHES, THE MOTOR GUNBOATS AND THE SPEEDY MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS THAT WERE TO MAKE AN UNDYING TRADITION OF THEIR OWN . . .

Chapter 1. COMMERCE RAIDER

LIKE MOST "AMATEUR SAILORS" OF THE ROYAL NAVAL VOLUNTEER RESERVE - THE WAVY NAVY - LIEUTENANT MICHAEL MURRAY HAD BEEN DRAWN STRAIGHT FROM CIVILIAN LIFE, PUSHED THROUGH INTENSIVE TRAINING AND THRUST INTO THE COMPLEXITIES OF A WAR AT SEA. YET HE AND THOSE LIKE HIM WERE EMERGING FROM THIS ACID TEST OF CHARACTER WITH A DASH AND DISTINCTION EQUAL TO ANY OF THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS BROTHERS IN THE ROYAL NAVY.



IN THE WHEELHOUSE BELOW THE BRIDGE, NORFOLK-BORN SUB-LIEUTENANT GEORGE REEDHAM EYED THE TWITCHING NEEDLE OF HIS COMPASS WITH DISFAVOUR. HE PRAYED THAT THE COURSE HE HAD SENT UP THE VOICE PIPE WAS NEARER RIGHT THAN HE EXPECTED.



DUTCHMAN JAN BLOCH, DUBBED "CHOKKER" BLOCH, OF THE ROYAL NETHERLANDS NAVY WAS AMUSED ONLY WHEN STALKING AN ENEMY WHOSE JACK-BOOTED INSOLENCE HAD OVER-RUN BOTH HIS HOME AND COUNTRY. HIS TOTAL DISREGARD OF DISASTER, ADDED TO MICHAEL MURRAY'S SCHEMING MIND, HAD FUSED THEM INTO AN EFFICIENT FIGHTING TEAM. BOTH SONS OF A SEA-FARING NATION, THEY FOUGHT THE WAR WITH THE DECEPTIVELY ROLLOCKING SPIRIT OF THEIR FOREFATHERS.

THE SPIRITS OF MY ANCESTORS SAY WE OUGHT TO STEER FOR BOULOGNE!

YOUR ANCESTORS TALK TOO MUCH. OKAY~~ WE'LL DO THAT.



NEITHER YOUNG COMMANDER WOULD ADMIT THAT HE WANTED TO BE THE FIRST TO SPOT A NEW, EXCITING TARGET REPORTED TO BASE THAT MORNING~~A FAST AND DANGEROUS COMMERCE RAIDER WHICH HAD SLIPPED OUT OF KIEL AND WAS MAKING FOR THE DOVER STRAIT.

WHY DON'T YOU GO BELOW AND TAKE A LOOK AT THAT TINNY ENGINE OF YOURS?

MY ANCESTORS SAY~~ 'NO THANKS'!

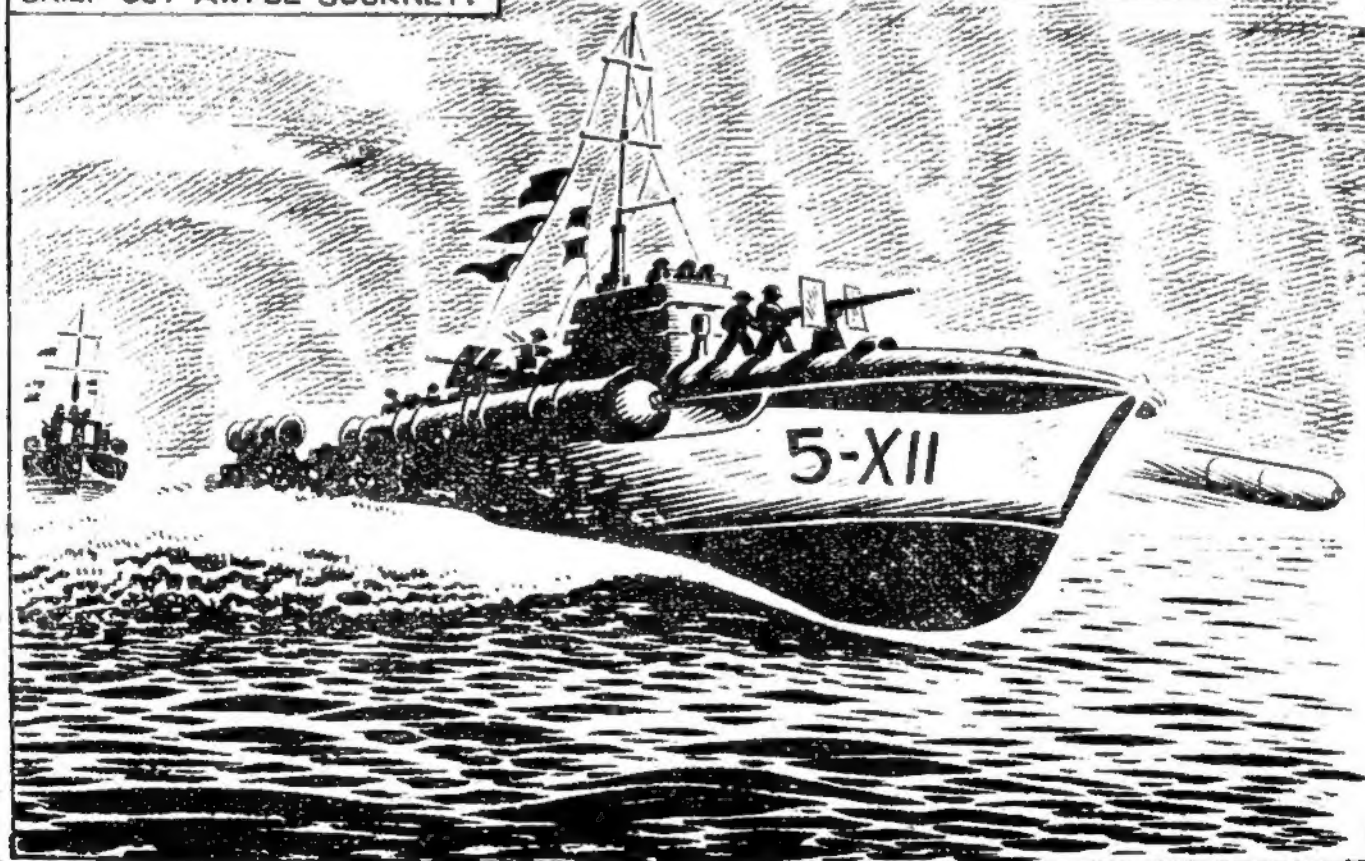


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QUIETLY SCOURING THE SEA OFF THE FRENCH COAST, THEY DID NOT SPOT THE RAIDER BUT WERE REWARDED BY THE RARE SIGHT OF AN ENEMY MERCHANTMAN AT ANCHOR. IT LOOKED ALMOST TOO EASY. CHOKKER SIGNALLLED MICHAEL TO GO IN FIRST AND HE STOLE FORWARD IN BREATHLESS DISBELIEF AT HIS GOOD LUCK.



MICHAEL CLOSED TO FIVE HUNDRED YARDS AND STEADIED. THEN ALMOST APOLOGETICALLY HE THUMPED THE LEVER WHICH SPED A TORPEDO ON ITS BRIEF BUT AWFUL JOURNEY.



THE TORPEDO HIT WITH A FLASH AND A FOUNTAIN OF WATER. BUT IN THE SAME MOMENT, THE MENACING SHAPE OF A GERMAN ARMED TRAWLER LOOMED UNPLEASANTLY CLOSE ...



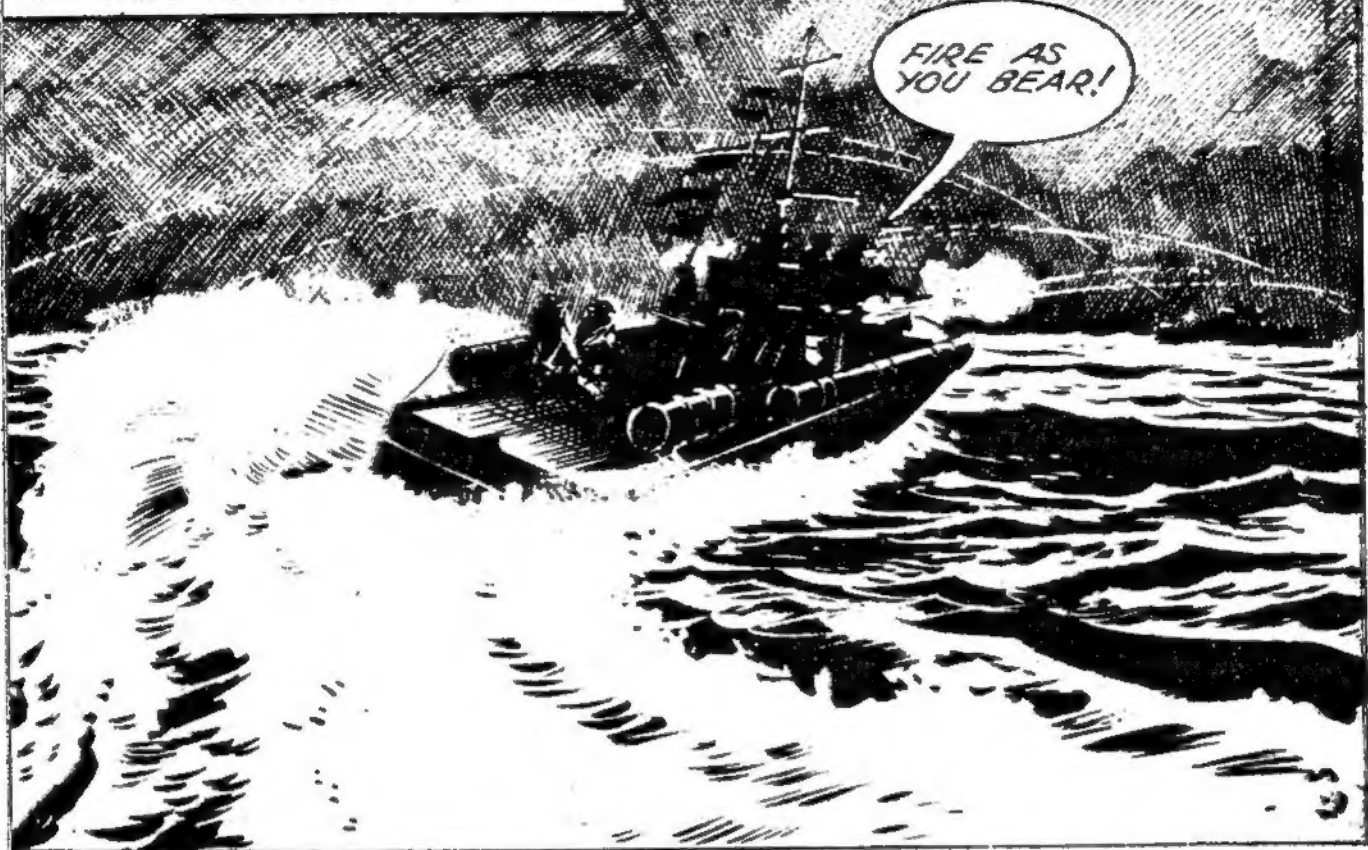
INTENT ON HIS AIM, MICHAEL SUDDENLY FOUND SHELLS SLAMMING INTO HIS BOAT. PETTY OFFICER FINCH, THE COX'N, YELLED A WARNING



Crash Start

MICHAEL PROMPTLY SPUN THE M.T.B. AND TRIED FOR A BEAM ATTACK.

FIRE AS YOU BEAR!



BUT CHOKKER HAD ALREADY ACHIEVED THIS TACTICAL AMBITION AND TO MICHAEL'S ALARMED INDIGNATION, THE DUTCHMAN LET FLY A TORPEDO.

YOU BLITHERING IDIOT, CHOKKER! YOU'LL HIT US!



FIGHTING THE TRAWLER ON THE ONE HAND AND WATCHING CHOKKER'S APPROACHING TORPEDO ON THE OTHER, MICHAEL'S CREW HAD A NASTY FEW MOMENTS.

LOOK OUT!

HARD OVER!

AYE, AYE, SIR!

5-XII

BUT THE TORPEDO WHISTLED HARMLESSLY UNDERNEATH THEM UNTIL IT HIT THE DEEPER DRAUGHT OF THE TRAWLER. MICHAEL'S BOAT LIFTED WITH THE FORCE OF THE CONCUSSION.



THAT FINISHED THE TRAWLER. AT MICHAEL'S IRATE YELL OF PROTEST, CHOKKER MERELY HOWLED WITH LAUGHTER.

YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN YOUR FACE! LUCKY THAT TORP WAS SET DEEP!



MICHAEL'S REMARKS WERE CUT SHORT BY A WARNING FROM GEORGE REEDHAM.

THERE'S SOMETHING WAY AHEAD. COULD BE A COUPLE OF CARGO BOATS.



MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT AT THAT. SIGNAL THE OTHERS.

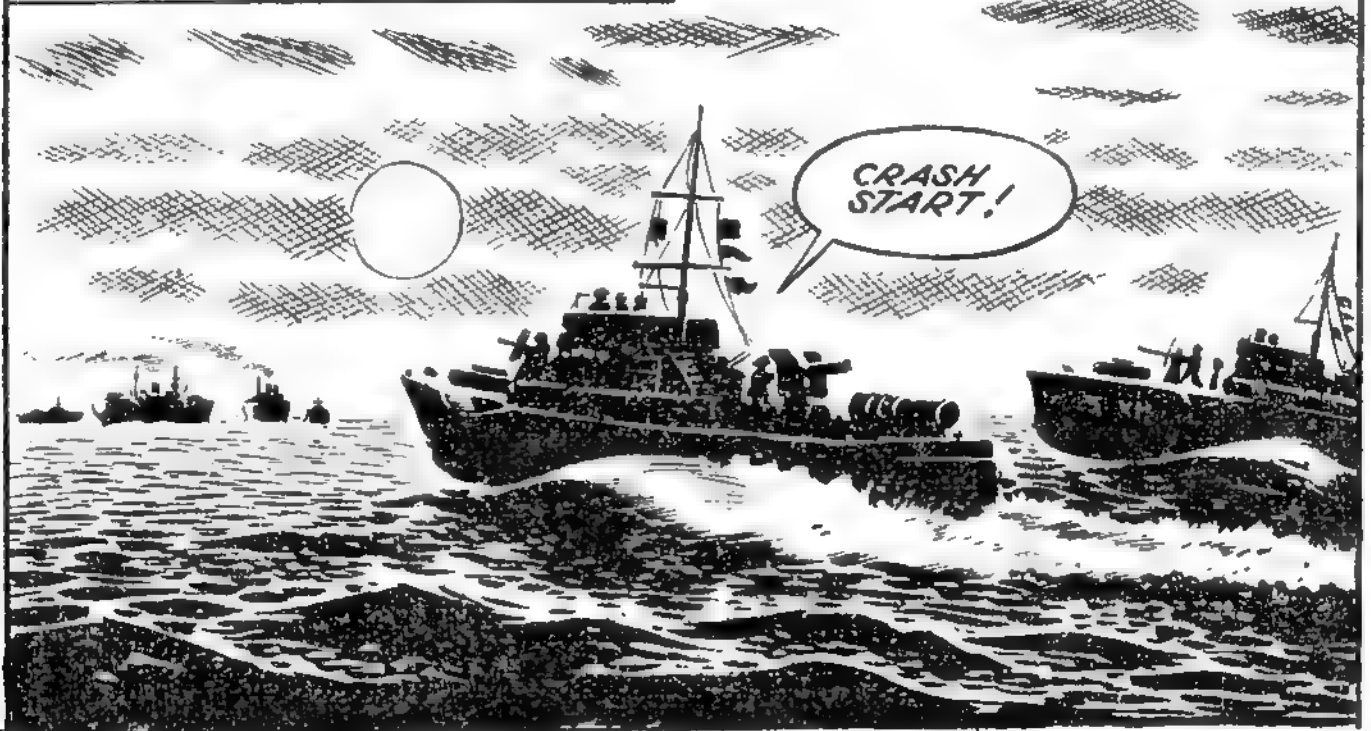
STOPPING FOR A SHORT CONFERENCE, MICHAEL AND CHOKKER DECIDED THAT THE SHAPES AHEAD WERE ENEMY SHIPPING, PROBABLY SCREENED BY E-BOATS. THEY AGREED ON THE WAIT-AND-POUNCE ROUTINE.

BOUND TO BE E-BOATS, MIKE. I'LL DRAW THEM OFF WHILE YOU GO IN AND HAVE A BASH.

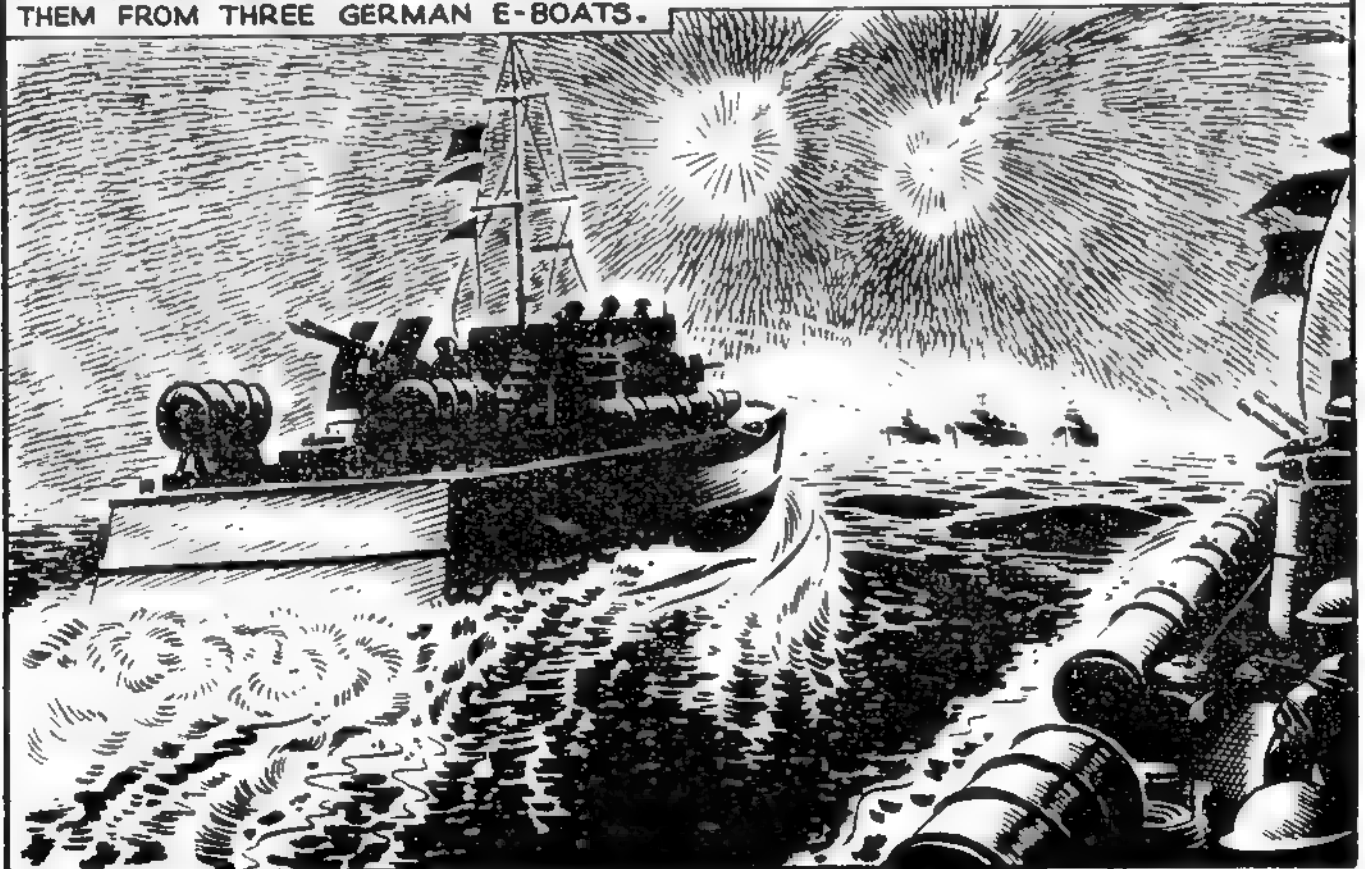
OKAY, CHEESEHEAD. LET'S GO!



SPEEDING AHEAD, THEY STOPPED AND LAY IN WAIT. THE MOMENT THE CONVOY GLINTED IN THE MOON-TRACK, MICHAEL BARKED THE ORDER AND BOTH BOATS SPRANG TO FULL-SPEED AHEAD.

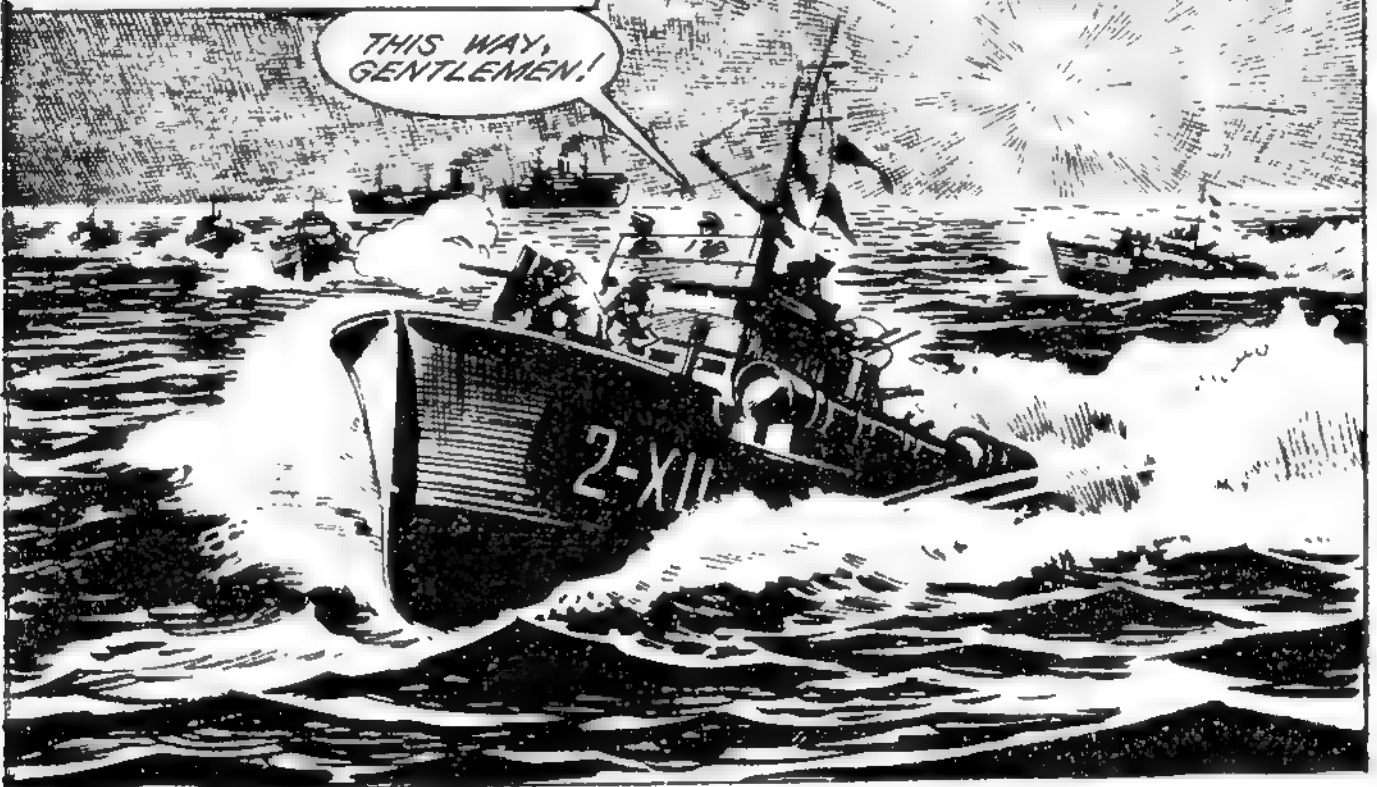


THE ROAR OF THE M.T.B.'S SPED OVER THE WATER AND BROUGHT INSTANT REACTION FROM A NERVOUS ENEMY. STARHELLS AND ARCING TRACER BULLETS CAME TO MEET THEM FROM THREE GERMAN E-BOATS.



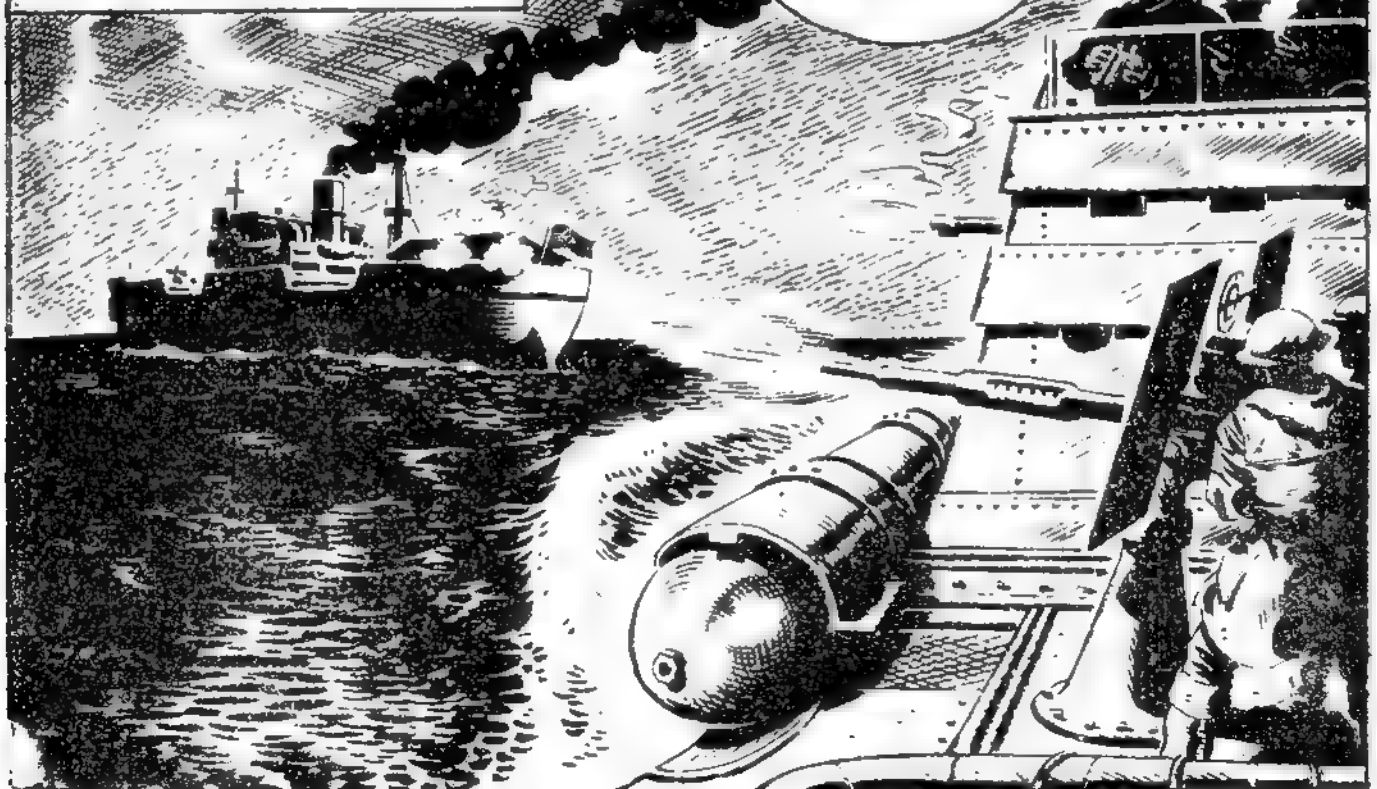
CHOKKER WENT IN WITH ALL GUNS BLAZING TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE E-BOATS WHILE MICHAEL SLIPPED IN BEHIND.

THIS WAY, GENTLEMEN!



MICHAEL AIMED AT THE FIRST CARGO BOAT BUT MISTIMED AND SWUNG OFF, EXCHANGING A HOT RETURN FIRE.

GIVE IT A MISS. WE'LL HAVE A CRACK AT THE SECOND ONE.



GOING INTO A TIGHT TURN, MICHAEL MANAGED TO GET HIS SIGHTS ON TO THE SECOND SHIP AND LET FLY, THIS TIME WITH NO MISTAKE.



MORE E-BOATS APPEARED FROM NOWHERE AND FOUND MICHAEL'S BOAT WITH SEARING TRACER WHICH WAS BOTH BLINDING AND ACCURATE. MEANWHILE, THE DOOMED CARGO BOAT LURCHED DEEPER INTO THE WATER.

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. CAN ANYONE SEE LIEUTENANT BLOCH?

HE'S PROBABLY FIRING AT US!



Crash Start

MICHAEL MANAGED TO BREAK OFF AND SPEED AWAY LOOKING ANXIOUSLY FOR CHOKKER. HE FOUND THE IRREPRESSIBLE YOUNG DUTCHMAN A MILE AWAY TAKING ON SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT FROM E-BOATS -- IT WAS A FAST, MODERN CARGO BOAT, PAINFULLY WELL ARMED. HAD HE FOUND THE RAIDER?

LOOKS LIKE HE'S IN TROUBLE. I THINK HE'S GOING ROUND IN LITERAL CIRCLES.

CHOKKER MUST BE CRAZY! THEY'LL BLOW HIM OUT OF THE WATER!



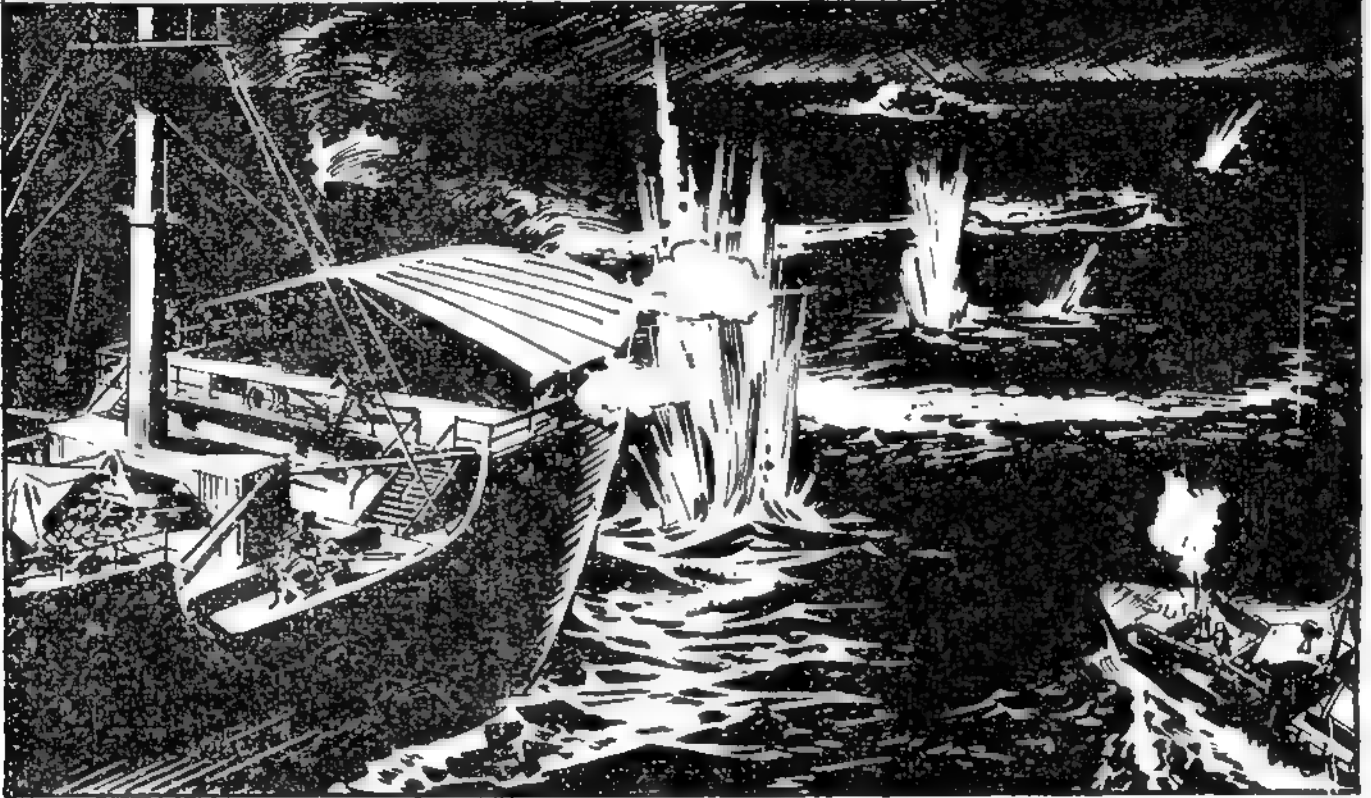
CHOKKER WAS INDEED IN TROUBLE. HIS STEERING WAS SHOT AWAY AND HIS BOAT WAS CAREERING DANGEROUSLY NEAR THE THRASHING SCREWS OF THE BIG BOAT UNDAUNTED, HE YELLED TO STAND BY DEPTH CHARGES.

THE STEERING'S GONE, SIR!

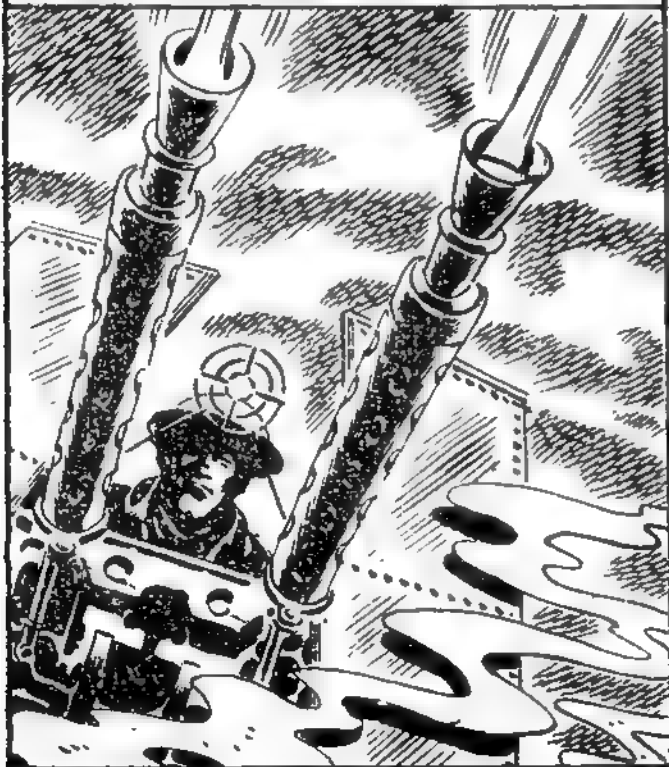
LET GO DEPTH CHARGE!



BUT THE PACE OF THE BIGGER BOAT WAS TOO MUCH AND THE DEPTH CHARGE EXPLODED HARMLESSLY ASTERN. AND NOW, AN E-BOAT CLOSED IN ON THE HELPLESS M.T.B.



AS CHOKKER'S BOAT SPED HELPLESSLY IN CIRCLES, THE E-BOAT DREW NEARER. BUT SEAMAN GUNNER FREDDIE COX, HANDLING HIS TWIN POINT-FIVES WITH PRECISION, MET THE ENEMY'S APPROACH WITH A BLISTERING FIRE.



THIS WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE E-BOAT WHICH WENT OFF LICKING ITS WOUNDS. MICHAEL THEN OVERTOOK CHOKKER AND TOGETHER THEY EXAMINED THE DAMAGE.



Crash Start

ON THE WAY HOME THEY SHOUTED THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THE BIG BOAT. WITH BOTH WIRELESS SETS SHOT AWAY, THEY WERE UNABLE TO CALL BASE.

THAT'S THE RAIDER
ALL RIGHT. IT MATCHES
UP WITH THE GEN WE
WERE GIVEN.

I BET SHE'S
SNEAKING DOWN
CHANNEL FOR THE
ATLANTIC. AND I BET
WE MADE A MESS OF
IT AND LET HER!



MEANWHILE SEAMAN GUNNER FREDDIE COX HAD COME ABOARD MICHAEL'S BOAT WITH PERMISSION TO VISIT HIS WOUNDED PAL.



NOW TAKE IT
EASY, ALF--THERE'S
NO CAUSE TO BE
DOWN HEARTED.

IT WAS ONLY A FEW SHORT MONTHS AGO THAT EIGHTEEN-YEAR OLD FREDDIE COX WAS SELLING OLD CHINA IN LONDON'S PETTICOAT LANE.

AFTER ALL, PLENTY OF
FELLAS GET SHOT IN THE
REAR. YOU'LL JUST HAVE
TO SHIN AROUND ON YER
STUMMICK FOR A BIT--
LIKE A FLIPPIN'
SEA-LION!



Chapter 2. SHOCK OF WAR

BY MID-MORNING NEWS OF CHOKKER'S BRUSH WITH THE RAIDER WAS BUZZING. EVERY AVAILABLE MAN AND BOAT WAS AT READINESS.



IT WAS NOT UNTIL NEARLY DUSK THAT NEWS CAME THROUGH TO ELECTRIFY A RESTLESS BRIEFING ROOM -- *THE RAIDER HAD BEEN SIGHTED!*



CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD, R.N., WAS CAPTAIN OF THE BASE, AND LIEUTENANT BRACE WAS THE SENIOR OFFICER OF THE FLOTILLA.

THE RAIDER IS HIDING UP IN THE SOMME ESTUARY. NO DOUBT SHE'LL SLIP OUT TONIGHT ON THE NEXT LEG OF HER BREAK-OUT INTO THE ATLANTIC.

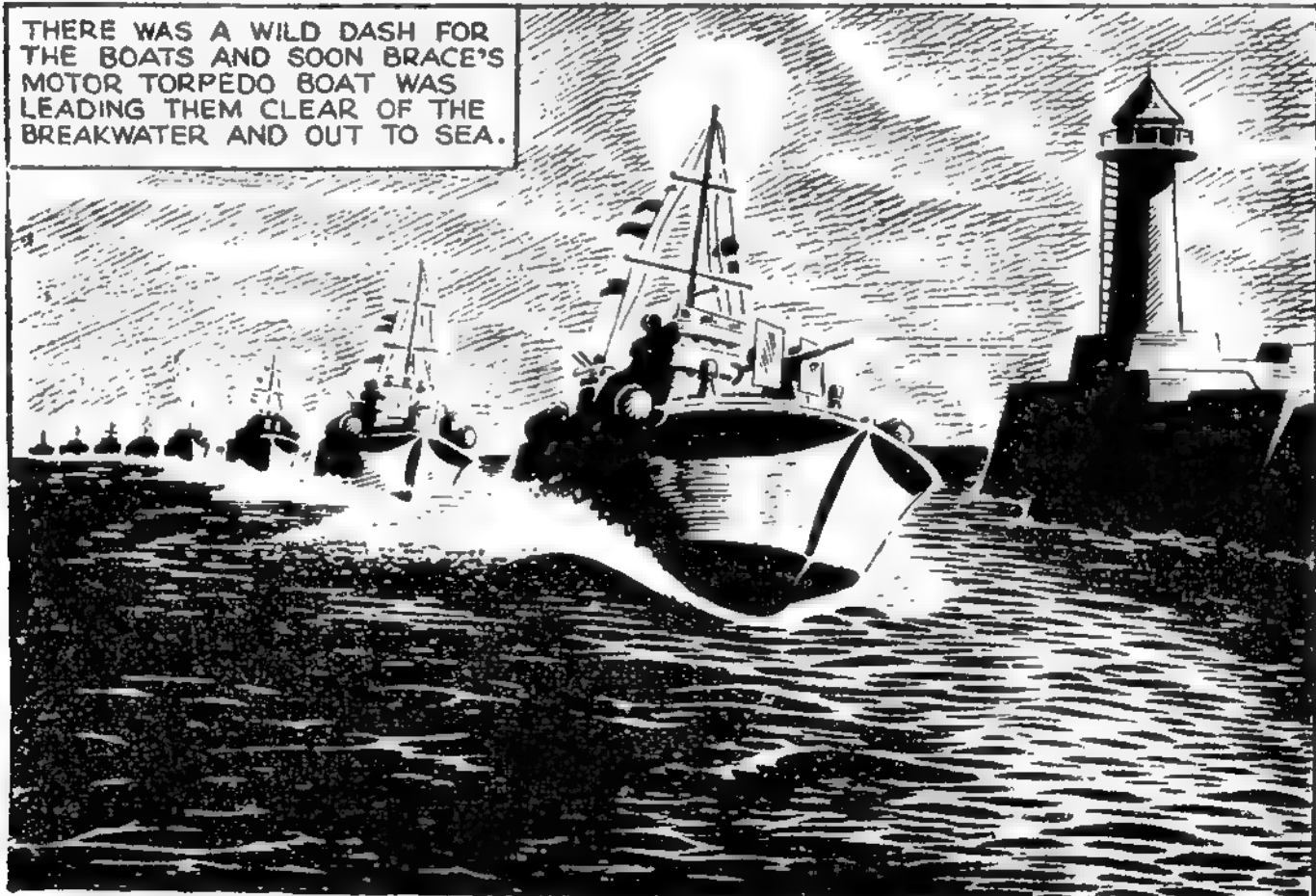


SUDDENLY THE TELEPHONE BELL RANG AND CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD RECEIVED THE LONG-AWAITED NEWS.

SHE'S OUT!
SHE'S BROKEN COVER,
PROCEEDING WESTWARD,
FAST! THERE IS A
STRONG ESCORT SCREEN.
GET GOING... AND
GOOD LUCK!



THERE WAS A WILD DASH FOR THE BOATS AND SOON BRACE'S MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT WAS LEADING THEM CLEAR OF THE BREAKWATER AND OUT TO SEA.



MICHAEL TINGLED AT THE SIGHT BEFORE HIM -- A LINE OF M.T.B.'S CLIPPING A GOOD FORTY KNOTS.



LOOKING ASTERN AT CHOKKER BRINGING UP THE REAR, MICHAEL SNATCHED UP AN ALDIS LAMP AND SIGNALLED, GRINNING AT CHOKKER'S FLASHING REPLY.



PRESENTLY MICHAEL HIMSELF GOT A SIGNAL FROM THE BOAT AHEAD...



MICHAEL AND CHOKKER SLOWED TO TEN KNOTS BUT THEY WERE MYSTIFIED.

VERY RUM.
WE'LL LOSE THEM
IN THIS FOG IF WE
DON'T LOOK OUT.

AM I DAFT?
THEY SAID SLOW
DOWN -- BUT
THEY'RE NOT.



MICHAEL AND CHOKKER AGREED TO GO ON, AND ALTHOUGH THEY INCREASED SPEED IT WAS SOON CLEAR THAT THEY HAD MISSED THE OTHERS IN THE MURK.

WE'D BETTER
PRESS ON, CHOKKER.
I'LL GET GEORGE TO
GIVE US A COURSE.



FEELING A LITTLE WORRIED, MICHAEL JOINED GEORGE REEDHAM IN THE WHEELHOUSE AND EXPLAINED THE POSITION.

WHERE DO
YOU RECKON
THE RAIDER
IS NOW?

SOMEWHERE
BETWEEN
TRÉPORT AND
DIEPPE, I'D
SAY. I'LL
WORK OUT
A COURSE.



BUT AS THEY NEARED THE FRENCH COAST, THE FOG PATCHES BECAME DENSE AND SOON THEY WERE GROPING AND LISTENING.

NO FUTURE IN THIS, CHOKKER.

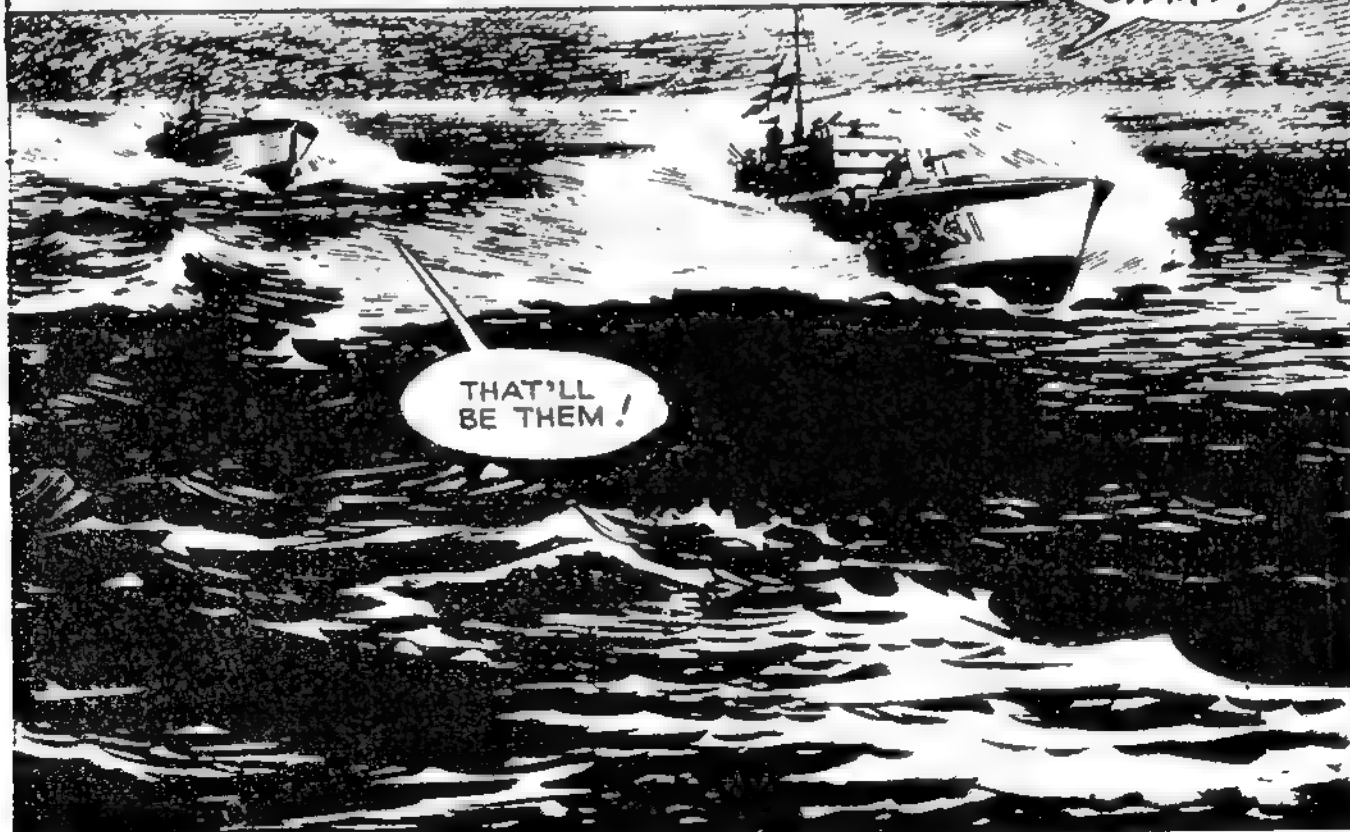
CAN I HEAR FIRING?



SUDDENLY, THEY HEARD THE CLATTER OF OERLIKONS AND POINT-FIVES COMING FROM THE DISTANCE. INSTANTLY MICHAEL SWUNG HIS BOAT ROUND FOLLOWED BY CHOKKER.

CRASH START!

THAT'LL BE THEM!

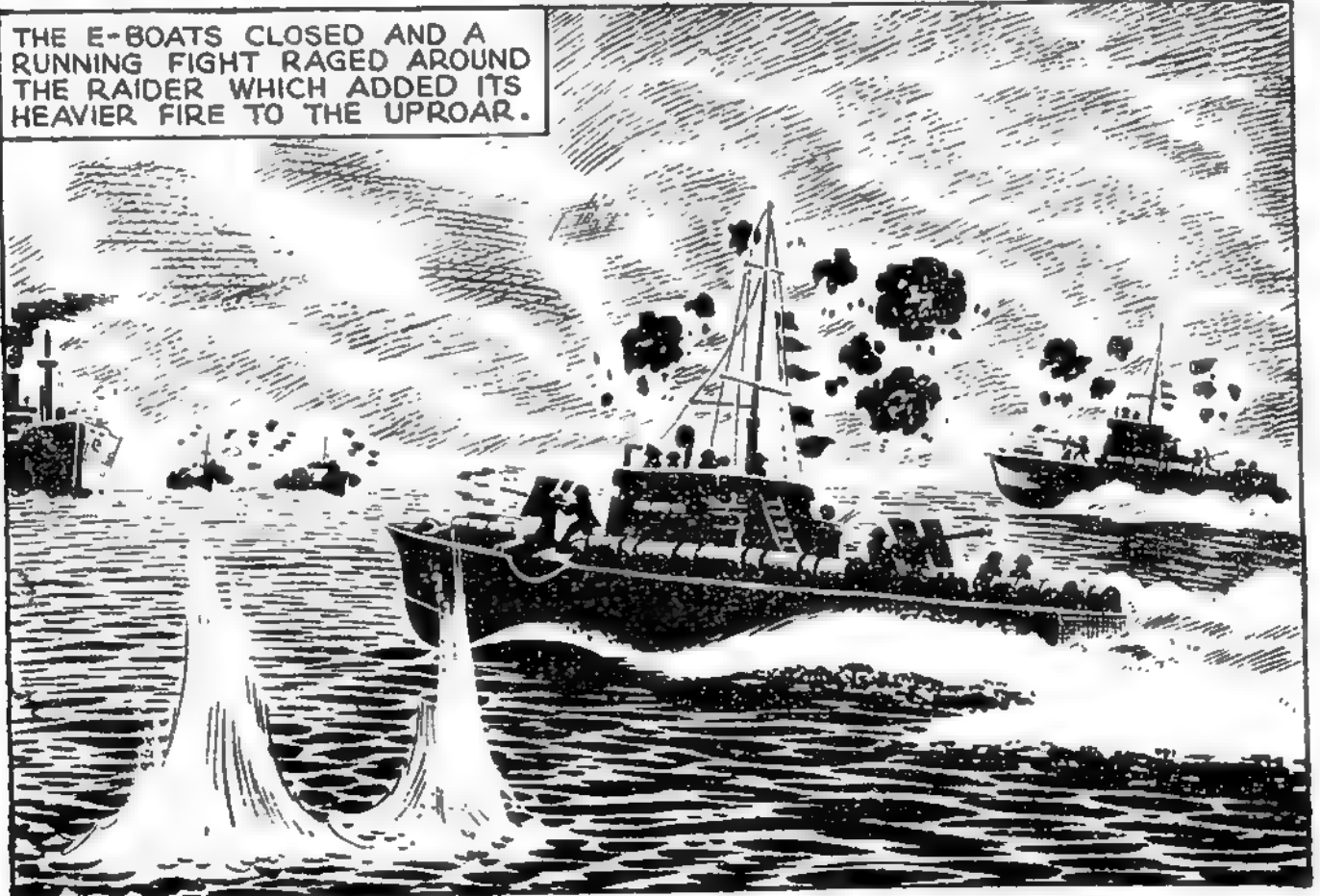


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THE NEXT SECOND THEY BURST UNEXPECTEDLY INTO CLEAR VISIBILITY AND FOUND THEMSELVES SET UPON BY E-BOATS...AND TO MICHAEL'S ASTONISHMENT, THERE WAS THE RAIDER!



THE E-BOATS CLOSED AND A RUNNING FIGHT RAGED AROUND THE RAIDER WHICH ADDED ITS HEAVIER FIRE TO THE UPROAR.



UNDAUNTED BY THE ODDS, THEY TRIED TO PRESS THROUGH FOR A TORPEDO ATTACK ON THE RAIDER. SEAMAN GUNNER FREDDIE COX ABOARD CHOKKER'S M.T.B. BLAZED A SHATTERING REPLY TO ONE E-BOAT WHOSE DECK SEEMED TO LIFT LIKE A SPLIT TIN.



MEANWHILE MICHAEL'S BOAT WAS RAKED BY A SECOND E-BOAT AND HIS GUNNER WAS HIT. HIS REPLY WAS TO SWING SHARPLY OVER, GETTING HIS FORWARD GUN TO BEAR.



Crash Start

SEEING THE RAIDER SLIPPING AWAY, CHOKKER GAVE CHASE BUT RAN INTO A MURDEROUS CURTAIN OF FIRE. IN DESPERATION HE DECIDED TO RELEASE HIS TORPEDOES.

HIT IN
THE ENGINE
ROOM, SIR!

FIRE
BOTH!



BUT THE RAIDER WENT ON UNSCATHED AND THEN THUMPED ANOTHER THREE-INCH SHELL INTO CHOKKER'S ENGINE ROOM WHICH STARTED A FIRE.

LOOK
OUT!



ANOTHER SHELL BLEW FREDDIE COX'S GUN CLEAN OUT OF HIS HANDS AND BLASTED HIM UNHURT INTO THE WATER.



WITH BLAZING FUEL SWILLING LOOSE IN THE BILGE, CHOKKER WAS FORCED TO QUIT. AND STILL THE RAIDER KEPT UP ITS MERCILESS FIRE.



THE CREW PLEADED WITH THEIR SKIPPER TO JUMP CLEAR, BUT CHOKKER MEANT TO MAKE SURE THAT THE BOAT WAS A TOTAL LOSS. SCORNFUL OF THE SHELLING FROM THE GERMAN RAIDER, HE SNATCHED UP A MILLS BOMB TO FINISH OFF HIS CRIPPLED BOAT.



MEANWHILE MICHAEL HAD OUTFOUGHT THE OTHER E-BOAT AND NOW, AS HE BROUGHT HIS BOAT ROUND TO PICK UP CHOKKER'S CREW, HE SAW THE FIGURE OF THE LIEUTENANT LIT UP BY FLAMES AS HE FLUNG THE MILLS BOMB INTO THE BLAZING ENGINE ROOM OF HIS M.T.B.



BUT A FINAL DEVASTATING SHELL FROM THE RAIDER CAME HURTLING OVER THE FLAME-LIT WATER AND BURST ON THE DECK OF THE M.T.B. CHOKKER WAS KILLED INSTANTLY.



THE NEXT SECOND THE BLAZING FUEL REACHED THE M.T.B.'S MAIN TANK...



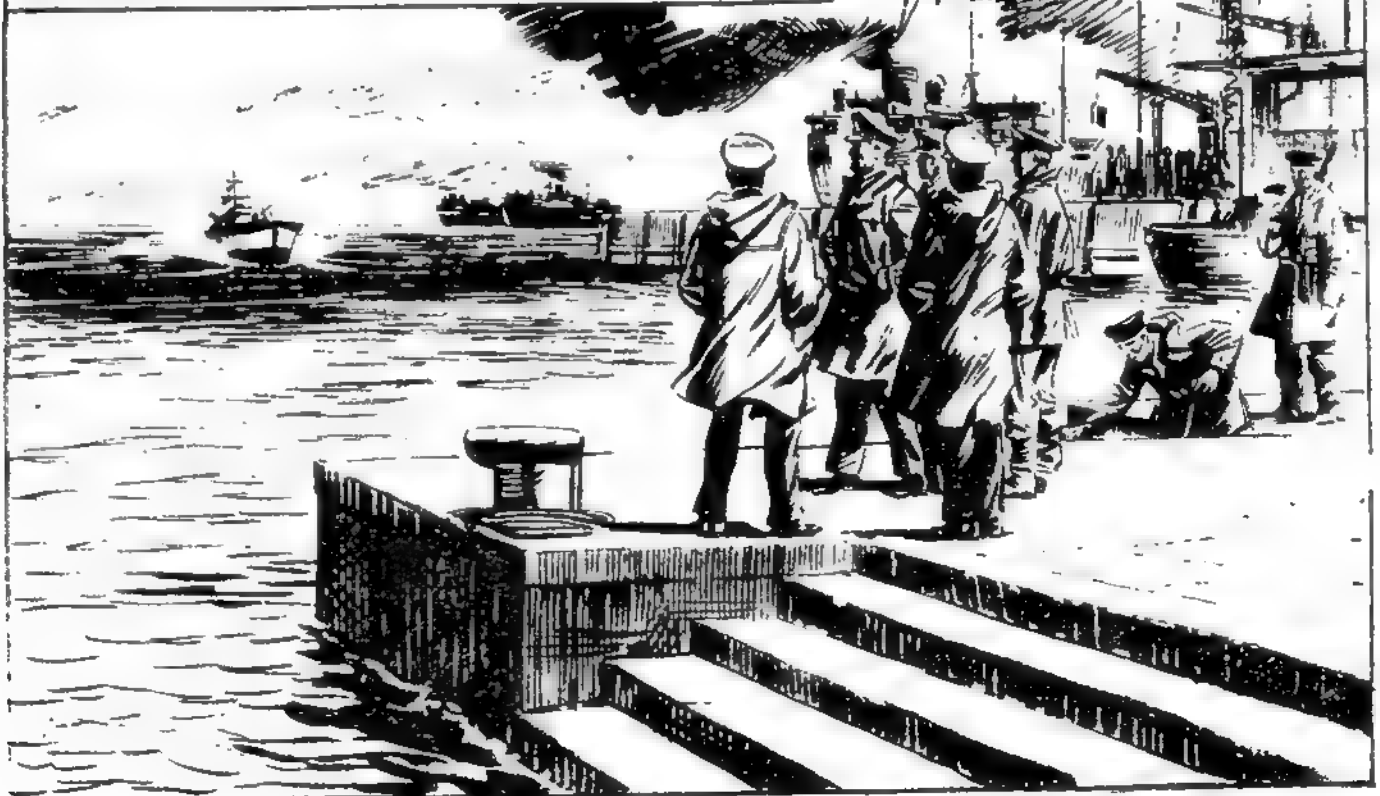
SATISFIED AT LAST WITH ITS WORK, THE RAIDER STEAMED ON, LEAVING MICHAEL AND THE OTHERS STUNNED.



WHILE CHOKKER'S CREW WERE BEING PULLED ABOARD, MICHAEL STARED AFTER THE RAIDER, FIRST WITH A DULL ANGUISH AND THEN WITH A FIERCE, MOUNTING FURY.



HOURS LATER, WITH HIS FACE SET LIKE STONE, MICHAEL BROUGHT HIS BOAT HOME... AND ON THE QUAYSIDE, WATCHING HIM COME IN, WAS LIEUTENANT BRACE WITH SOME FELLOW OFFICERS.



WITH THE WOUNDED SEEN SAFELY ASHORE, MICHAEL CLIMBED WEARILY TO THE QUAYSIDE WHERE HE MET AN ANGRY BRACE.

WHERE THE DEVIL DID YOU AND BLOCH GET TO? AND WHERE ~~IS~~ BLOCH?

DEAD! GERMAN RAIDER GOT HIM WITH A DIRECT HIT!

GERMAN RAIDER! THERE HASN'T BEEN ONE WITHIN MILES OF YOU!



MICHAEL GAVE BRACE A SUDDEN HOT LOOK AND ONLY JUST SAVED HIS FIST FROM LIFTING IN QUICK TEMPER.

YOU'D BETTER COME WITH ME TO CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD.



CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD
HEARD MICHAEL'S TRAGIC
STORY AND MURMURED
HIS SYMPATHIES.

NATURALLY YOU'RE UPSET,
MURRAY--AND THAT MAKES
WHAT I HAVE TO SAY
VERY MUCH HARDER...



I HAVE TO TELL YOU, MURRAY,
THAT POOR BLOCH'S GALLANT DEATH
WAS NEVER NECESSARY. YOU DID
NOT FIGHT THE RAIDER. IT WAS
ELSEWHERE--BEING FOUGHT BY
THE MAIN FORCE OF M.T.B.'S.



THIS NEWS STAGGERED MICHAEL...

BUT CHEER UP...
THE RAIDER WAS
ATTACKED AND SUNK
WITH HEAVY LOSSES TO
THE DEFENSIVE SCREEN
OF E-BOATS.

BUT, SIR--THAT'S
IMPOSSIBLE! WE DID
MEET THE RAIDER.
AFTER ALL, WE
SHOULD KNOW WHAT
IT LOOKED LIKE.





AFTER LISTENING CAREFULLY TO HIS CAPTAIN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION MICHAEL FELT BOUND TO SPEAK BOLDLY.

SIR, THE MAIN ATTACK DID NOT SINK THE RAIDER. I THINK THEY SANK A DECOY. THE REAL RAIDER PRESSED ON DOWN THE CHANNEL AND MET ME AND LIEUTENANT BLOCH.



CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD STUDIED MICHAEL'S WORRIED FACE. HAD HIS YOUNG OFFICER STUMBLER ON AN ENEMY RUSE?



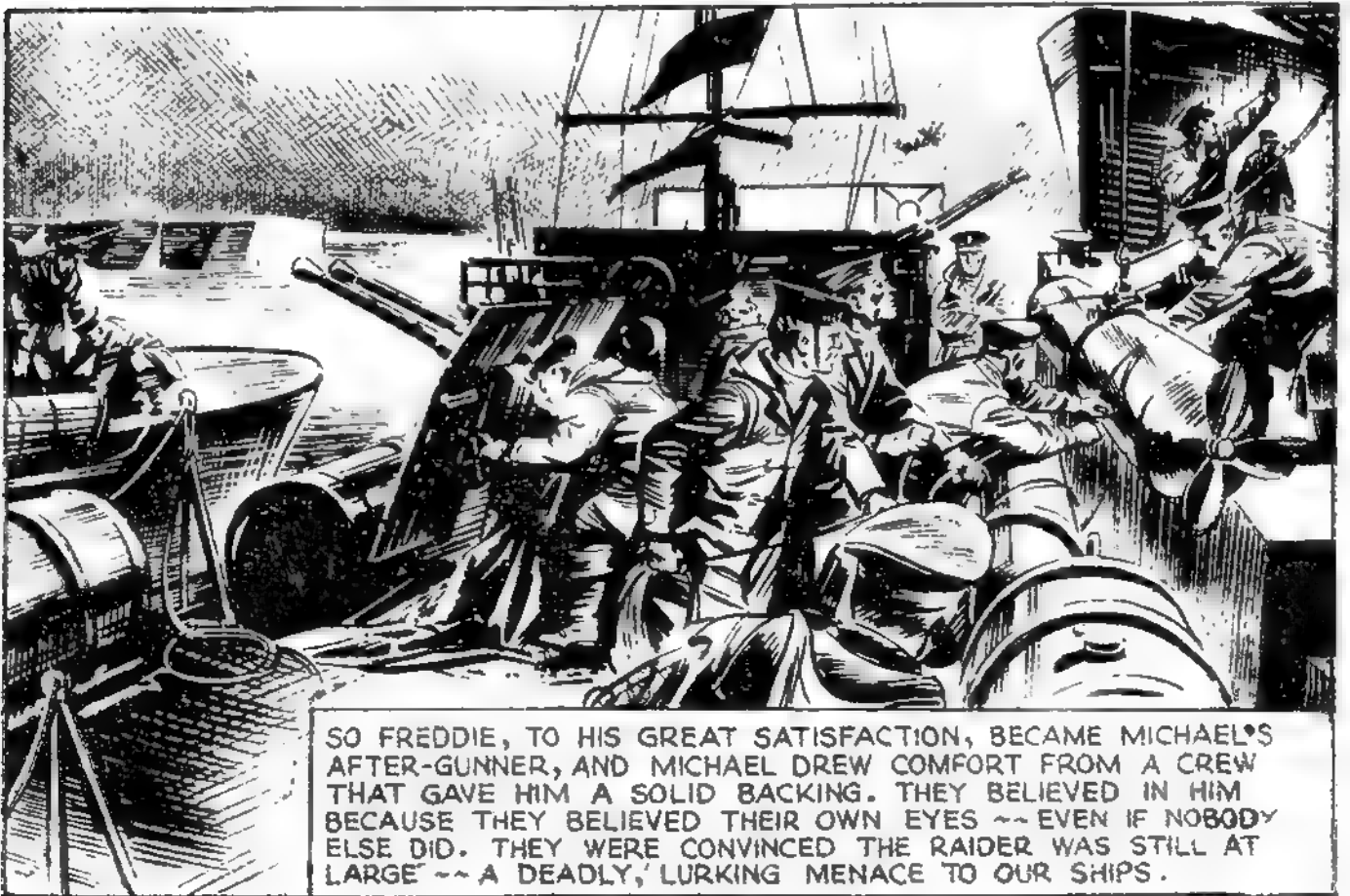
Chapter 3. NIGHT ATTACK

BY THE AFTERNOON THE ANSWER CAME -- "NO TRACE OF RAIDER. BELIEVED SUNK PREVIOUS NIGHT". MICHAEL WAS LEFT TO BROOD AND NURSE HIS GRIEF. NO ONE BELIEVED THAT THE RAIDER WAS STILL AFLOAT. CHOKKER, THEY KEPT SAYING, NEED NOT HAVE DIED



FREDDIE COX DIFFIDENTLY APPROACHED THE GLOOMY MICHAEL WITH SOMETHING ON HIS MIND, AND AFTER AN AWKWARD START HE JERKED IT OUT.





Crash Start

WATCHING HIS CREW PREPARE FOR A NIGHT PATROL, MICHAEL KNEW THAT A CHANGE HAD COME OVER HIMSELF. HAUNTED BY CHOKKER'S LAST MOMENTS, HIS GRIEF HAD NOW TURNED TO A SOUR HATRED OF THIS ACCURSED RAIDER --AND OF ALL THINGS GERMAN.



NIGHT CAME AND BRACE ARRIVED WITH NEWS FOR MICHAEL AND ANOTHER M.T.B. COMMANDER -- LIEUTENANT JACK FENNER.

AN ENEMY CONVOY'S BEEN SIGHTED OFF ST. VALERY. A TRIP WILL DO YOU GOOD, MURRAY. FENNER HERE WILL TAKE THE THIRD BOAT. YOU ALL READY?

YES.



AS THEY SET COURSE, MICHAEL'S BROODING FOCUSED ON THE TOUGH LIEUTENANT BRACE IN THE LEADING BOAT.

I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO KNOCK THAT COCKY BIRD OFF HIS PERCH ~~ A SIGHT OF THE RAIDER FOR INSTANCE ~~ THAT WOULD SHAKE HIM !



REACHING THE ENEMY SIDE, A MONOTONOUS PATROL WAS SUDDENLY SHATTERED BY A SIGNAL FROM BRACE'S NUMBER ONE. MICHAEL JERKED TO LIFE.

ENEMY IN SIGHT TO PORT !

READY BOTH ?

READY BOTH, SIR



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MICHAEL TENSED AS REEDHAM IDENTIFIED THEIR QUARRY...

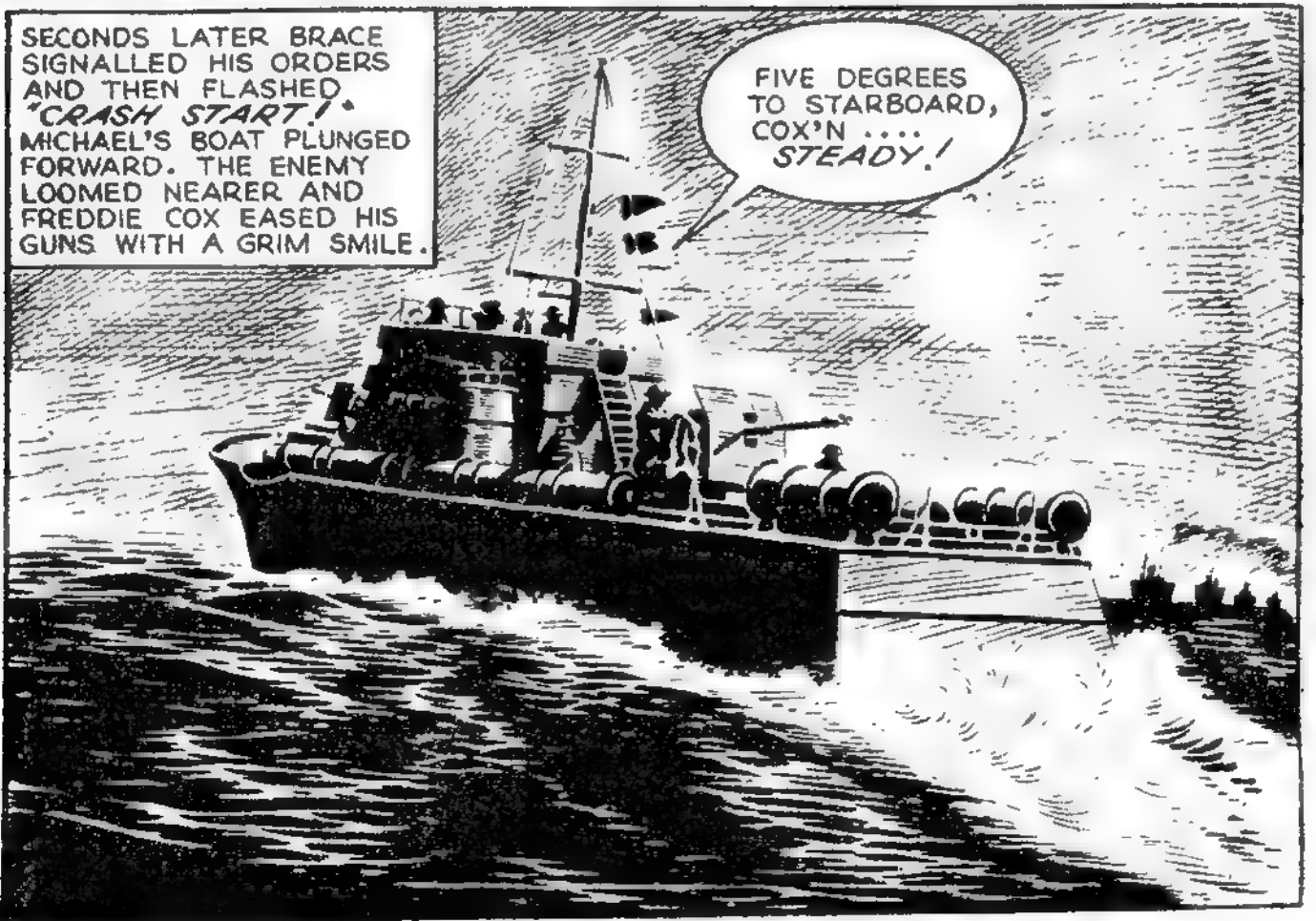
FOUR CARGO BOATS!
LOOKS LIKE A MINELAYER
GUARDING THEM. BET
THERE'LL BE E-BOATS,
TOO!

GOOD ~~
FEEL LIKE A
SCRAP!



SECONDS LATER BRACE
SIGNALLLED HIS ORDERS
AND THEN FLASHED
"CRASH START!"
MICHAEL'S BOAT PLUNGED
FORWARD. THE ENEMY
LOOMED NEARER AND
FREDDIE COX EASED HIS
GUNS WITH A GRIM SMILE.

FIVE DEGREES
TO STARBOARD,
COX'N
STEADY!



AT ONCE ENEMY STARSHELLS AND TRACER SPLIT THE DARKNESS. MICHAEL WAS TO DRAW OFF THE MINELAYER WHILE THE OTHERS WENT IN.



MICHAEL'S TENSION GAVE PLACE TO A BITTER HATE. SPURNING THE ENEMY FIRE, HE AIMED STRAIGHT FOR THE MINELAYER. A QUICK LOOK HAD SHOWN HIM JACK FENNER ATTACKING THE TRAWLER WHILE BRACE WAS SHAPING FOR A CARGO BOAT.



WITH COLD PRECISION, MICHAEL PLOTTED DISTANCE, COURSE AND SPEED. DEAF TO THE CRASH OF SHELLS AND THE CRY OF A WOUNDED MAN, MICHAEL STARED ALONG HIS SIGHTS ... 600 YARDS ... 500 YARDS ... AND THEN CAME THE FIERCE COMMAND ...



Crash Start

MICHAEL SWUNG CLOSE TO THE MINELAYER WITH HIS EYES ON THE TORPEDO'S DREAD COURSE. HIS MIND WAS ABLAZE WITH ONE OBJECT -- **ATTACK!**



AT THE COMMAND, FREDDIE AND HIS CO-GUNNERS SMARTLY GAVE AS GOOD AS THEY WERE GETTING. IN THE SAME MOMENT, THE TORPEDO RAMMED HOME WITH FEARFUL IMPACT.

BARELY SATISFIED, MICHAEL BROKE OFF AND STARED BACK AT HIS VICTIM WITH A BLEAK LOOK. THE MINELAYER WAS STOPPED IF NOT SUNK. THERE WAS STILL THE ARMED TRAWLER ...



SOUNDS OF FURIOUS FIGHTING BROUGHT MICHAEL RACING TO WHERE FENNER WAS BEING MAULED BY THE HEAVILY ARMED TRAWLER.

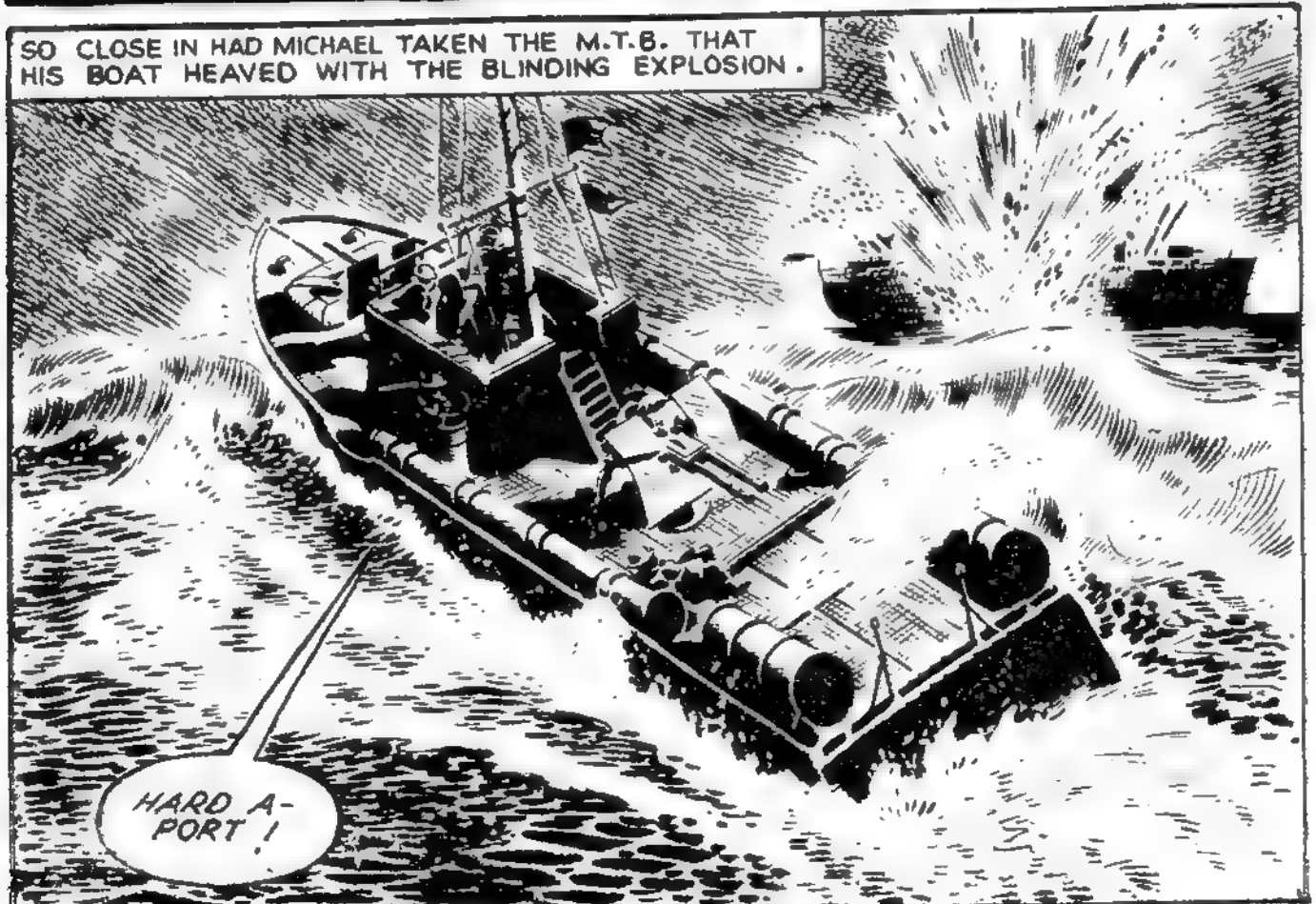


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IGNORING THE CURTAIN OF FIRE, MICHAEL RACED IN. UNWINKINGLY HE STARED ALONG HIS SIGHTS. THE NOISE, THE GLARE OF THE TRACER BULLETS MEANT NOTHING TO HIM. THE CREW GASPED! *NOW -- SURELY NOW!*

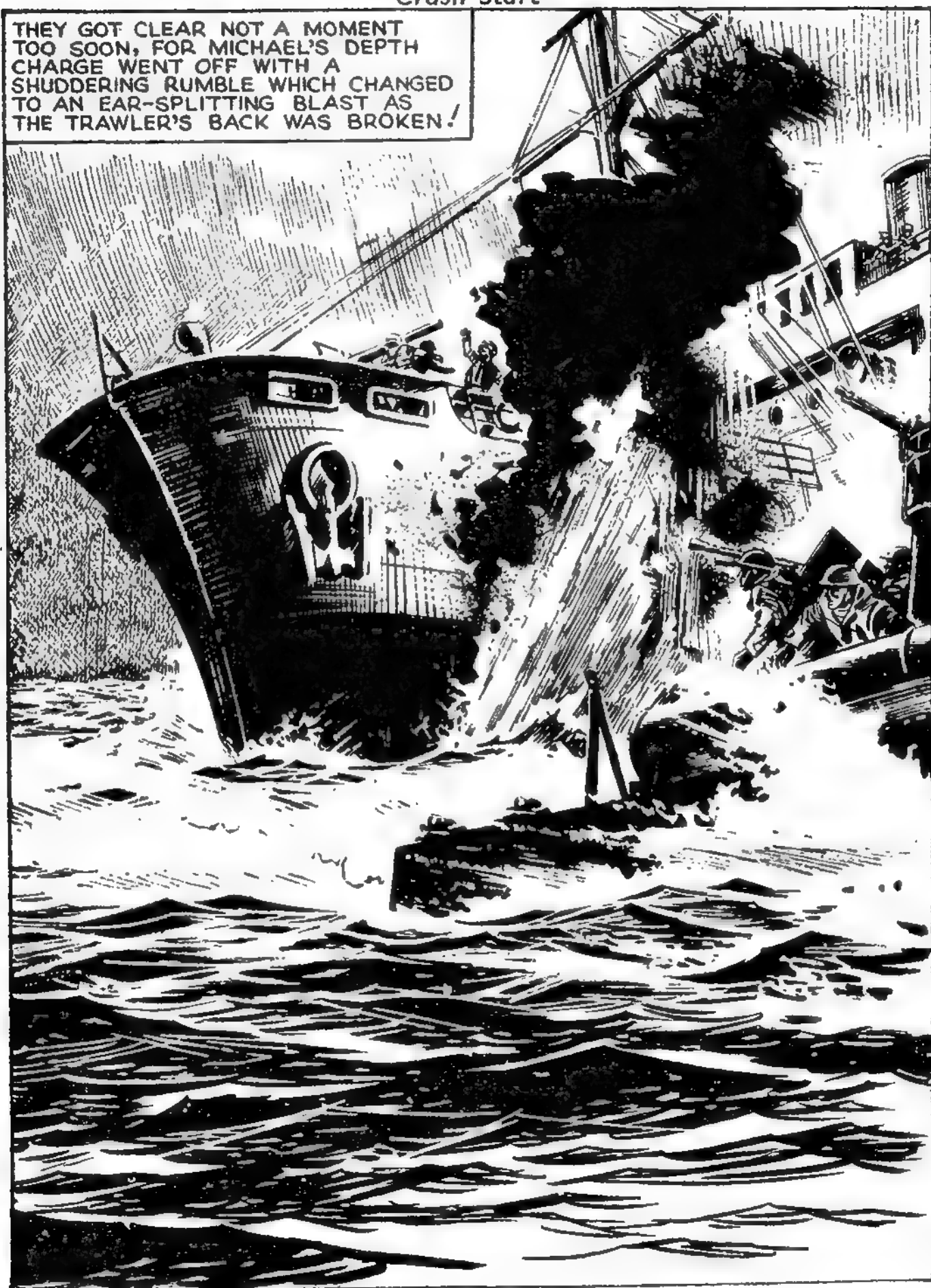


SO CLOSE IN HAD MICHAEL TAKEN THE M.T.B. THAT HIS BOAT HEAVED WITH THE BLINDING EXPLOSION.





THEY GOT CLEAR NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON, FOR MICHAEL'S DEPTH CHARGE WENT OFF WITH A SHUDDERING RUMBLE WHICH CHANGED TO AN EAR-SPLITTING BLAST AS THE TRAWLER'S BACK WAS BROKEN!



AS MICHAEL COLDLY STOOD OFF AND WATCHED THE GERMANS FLINGING IN FLOATS AND JUMPING AFTER THEM, NOT A FLICKER OF EMOTION TOUCHED HIS FLAME-REFLECTED FACE. THE CREW EYED THEIR SKIPPER ASKANCE. THEY FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING UNNATURAL ABOUT THIS MAN ON THE BRIDGE.



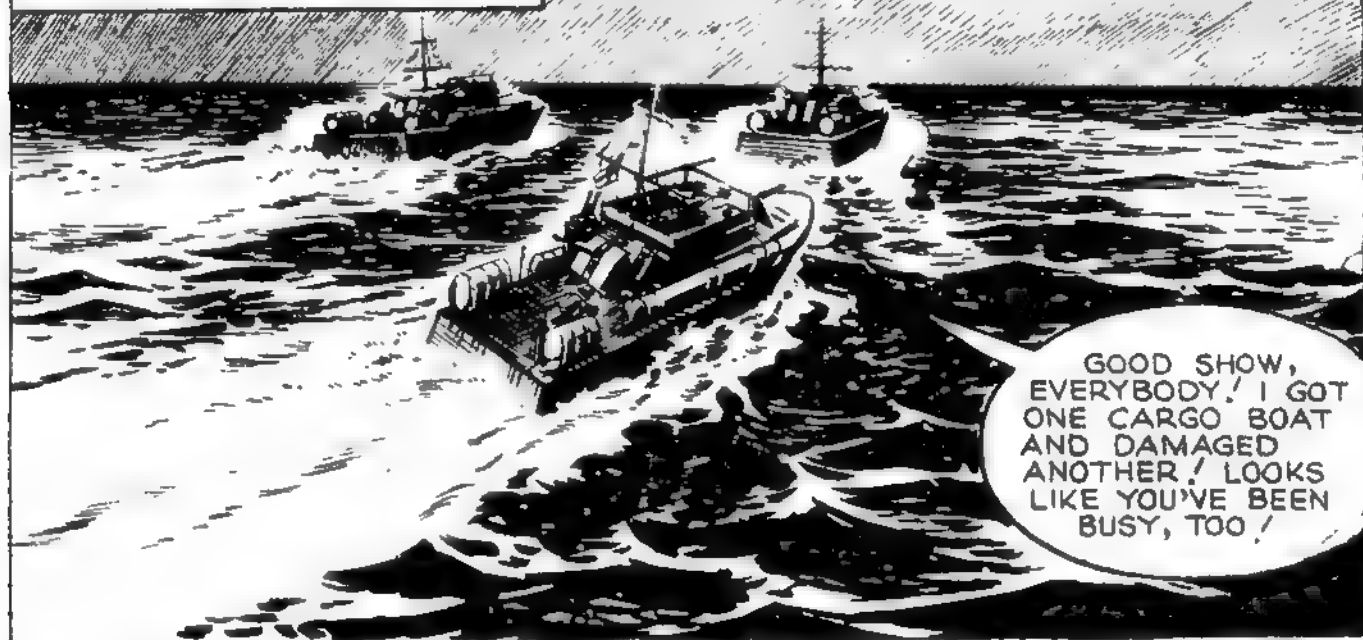
TOO INTENT ON GETTING HIS BREATH, FREDDIE COX WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO DID NOT FEEL THE COLD SHIVER THAT RAN THROUGH THE OTHERS

WHEE! YOU COULD COOK A KIPPER ON THESE 'ERE GUNS -- TALK ABOUT 'OT!



Chapter 4. MAD MURRAY

THE THREE BRITISH TORPEDO BOATS CLOSED UP TO EACH OTHER AND BRACE GAVE AN UNEXPECTEDLY CHEERFUL HAIL.



GOOD SHOW, EVERYBODY! I GOT ONE CARGO BOAT AND DAMAGED ANOTHER! LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN BUSY, TOO!

BUT MICHAEL HAD NO ANSWERING GREETING. INSTEAD HE HAD A PROPOSITION.

I'VE A HUNCH THIS RAIDER'S HIDING UP IN THE SEINE ESTUARY! HOW ABOUT GIVING THE PLACE A LOOK?

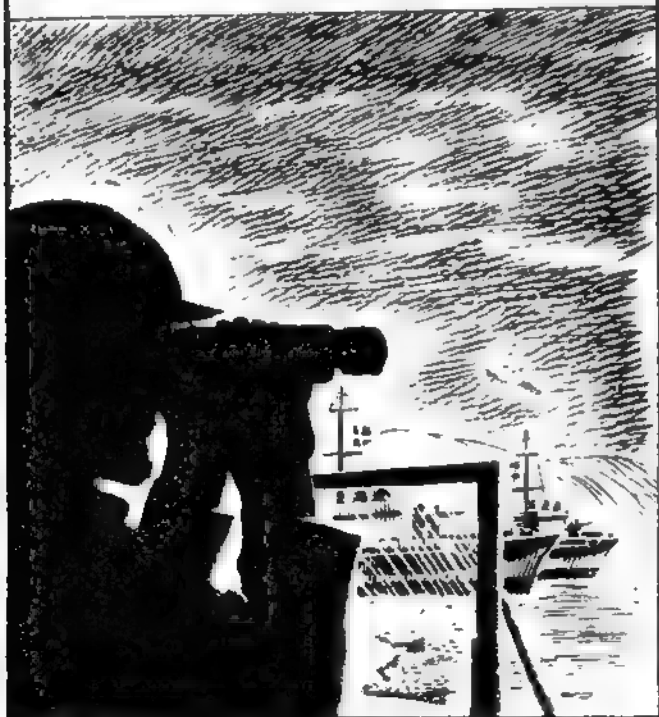
WHAT.... TONIGHT!



AT FIRST BRACE WOULD NOT HEAR OF IT, BUT FEELING HALF SORRY FOR MICHAEL AND BEING VERY PLEASED WITH THE NIGHT'S WORK, HE AT LAST CAUTIOUSLY AGREED.



THE THREE BOATS MOVED DOWN CHANNEL AND SLIPPED QUIETLY INTO THE SEINE ESTUARY. THE COMMANDERS TRAINED THEIR GLASSES ON THE BANKS FOR ANY SIGN OF THE RAIDER.



A FEW ENEMY RIVER CRAFT PASSED THEM LIKE PHANTOMS AND THE M.T.B.'S DRIFTED WITH ENGINES CUT TILL THEY HAD GONE. THEN THEY CREPT FURTHER IN



SOON BRACE
CONSIDERED THEY
HAD PENETRATED
FAR ENOUGH AND
TRIED TO RECALL
MICHAEL. TO HIS
VEXATION HE SAW
THE OTHER'S M.T.B.
SPEED UP IN THE
DIRECTION OF THE
FAR BANK.



MURRAY HAD
SEEN HIS QUARRY,
THE ELUSIVE
RAIDER! HE
COULD JUST
DISCERN IT UNDER
THE SHADOW OF
THE FAR BANK,
CAMOUFLAGED
BY NETTING
AND TREES.



UNHEEDING BRACE'S OPEN CALLS, MICHAEL WENT ON. SO HE AND CHOKKER WERE RIGHT! THE RAIDER WAS STILL AFLOAT. A QUIVER OF EXCITEMENT RAN THROUGH THE BOAT.



LOW IN THE WATER AHEAD FLASHED A CHALLENGING SIGNAL... AND THEN CAME THE OMINOUS ROAR OF E-BOATS CRASH-STARTING!



ACTION STATIONS FOR EVERYBODY, NUMBER ONE. I WANT EVERY AVAILABLE MAN ON DECK. HAND OUT ALL THE TOMMY GUNS, MILLS BOMBS AND ANY OTHER WEAPON YOU CAN LAY HANDS ON!

MICHAEL'S FOOLHARDY INTENTIONS WERE OBVIOUS TO BRACE...



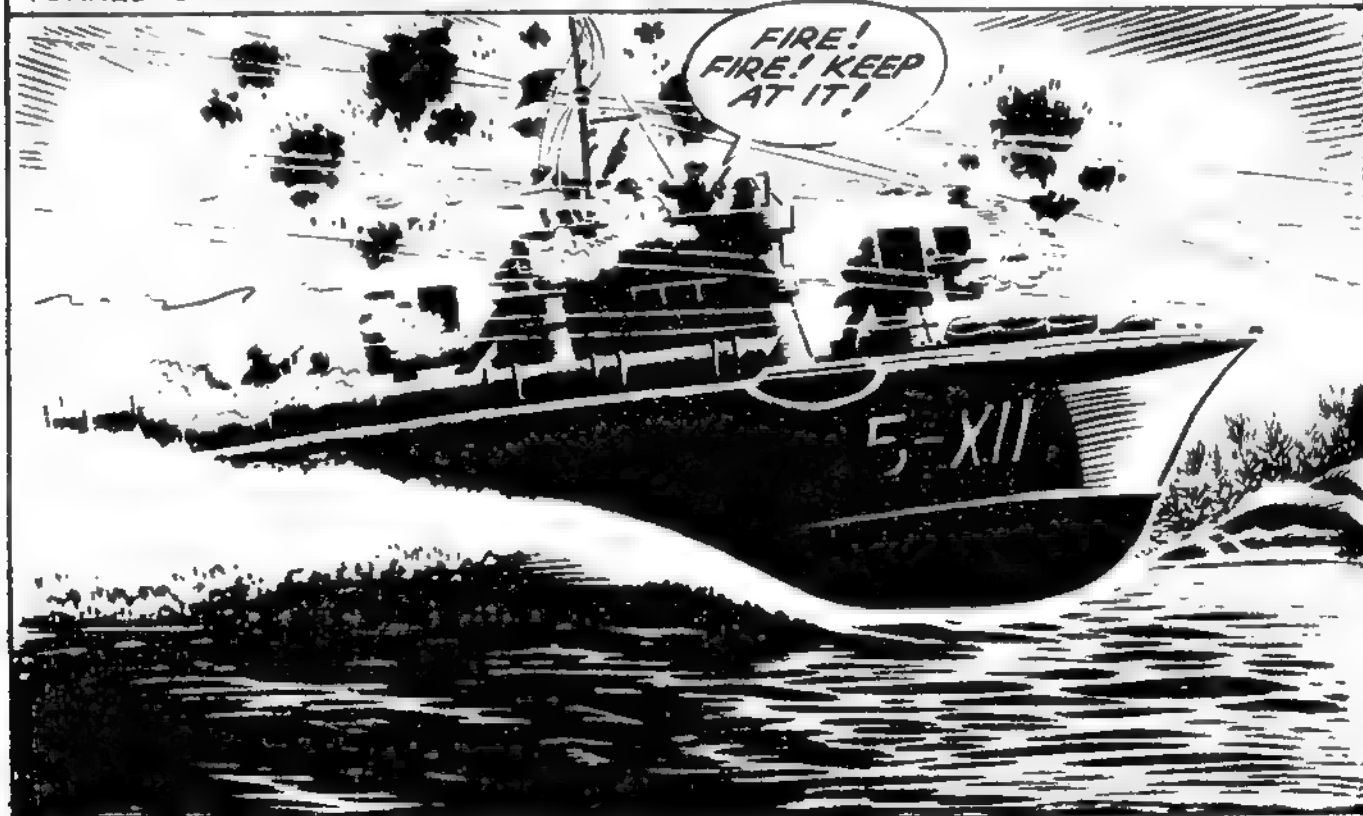
BUT MICHAEL WAS DEAF TO EVERYTHING BUT THE BLINDING URGE TO GET TO GRIPS WITH THE ENEMY!

OPEN FIRE!
EVERY MAN--
FIRE!



TO MICHAEL, THE E-BOATS WERE NOTHING BUT FRUSTRATION. HIS INFLAMED MIND WAS BENT ON ONE THING -- *THE RAIDER!* BAULKED IN THIS, HE TURNED ON THE ENEMY BOATS IN VICIOUS FURY....

FIRE!
FIRE! KEEP
AT IT!



THE ODDS WERE TREMENDOUS,
BUT THE BRITISH M.T.B.
FOUGHT WITH SUCH FURY,
GUNNING AND RAMMING, THAT
THE ENEMY WERE UNABLE
TO PRESS HOME THEIR
ADVANTAGE.



DESPITE MICHAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE OF ORDERS, BRACE COULD NOT LEAVE HIM AND HIS CREW TO THEIR FATE, SO HE LED FENNER TOWARDS THE FIGHT.



THIS RELIEVED THE PRESSURE ON MICHAEL AND HE SNATCHED A LOOK AT THE RAIDER. AT ONCE HE RANG FOR TOP SPEED, BUT THERE WAS NO RESPONSE.



BUT AN EXHAUST MANIFOLD HAD BEEN SHOT AWAY AND THE ESCAPING GASSES HAD OVERCOME THE ENGINE ROOM CREW.



NOT REALISING WHAT HAD HAPPENED,
MICHAEL GAVE A FURIOUS YELL

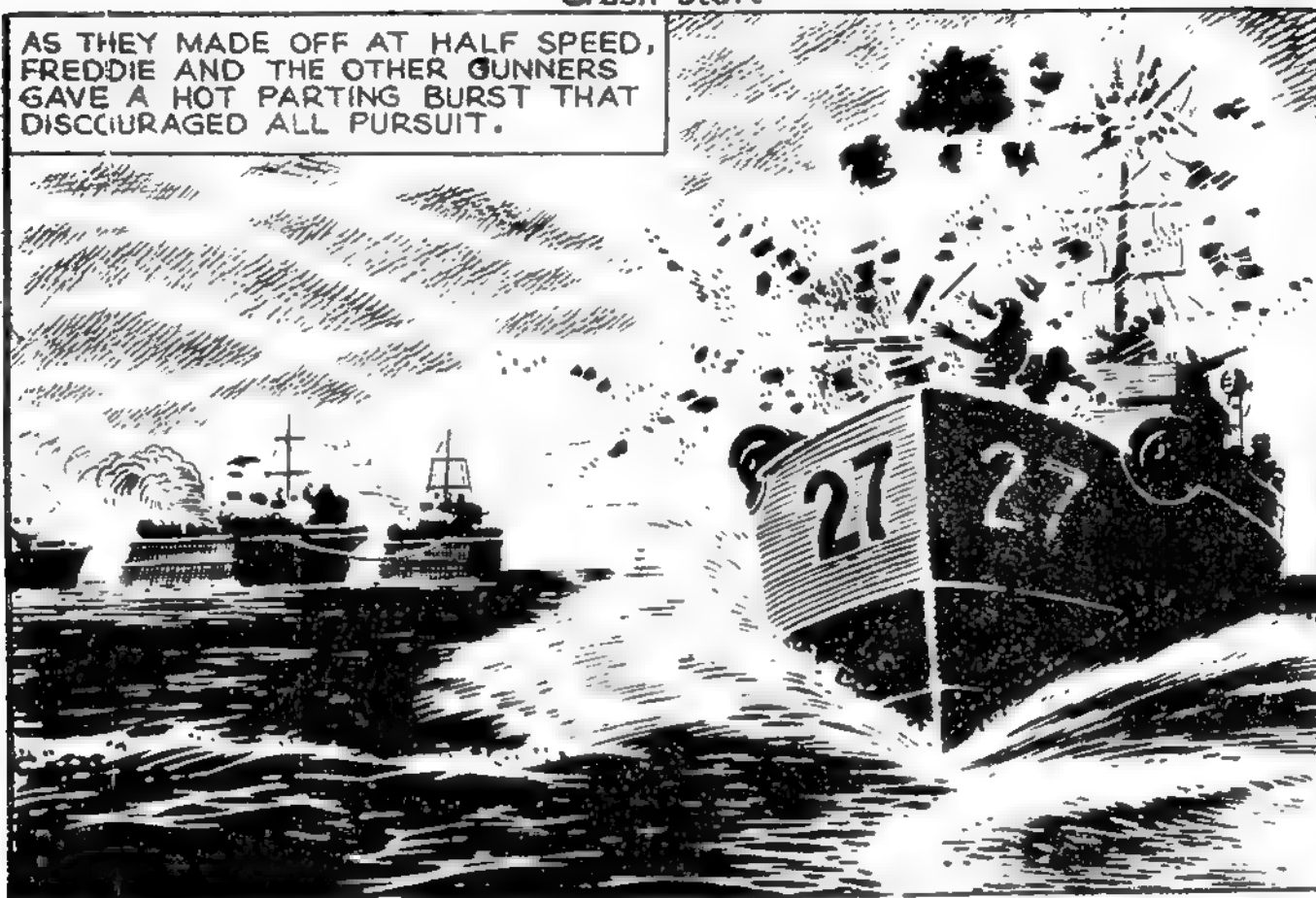


LIEUTENANT BRACE TOOK IN THE SITUATION AT ONCE AND
A LINE WAS FLUNG TO MICHAEL'S CRIPPLED BOAT.

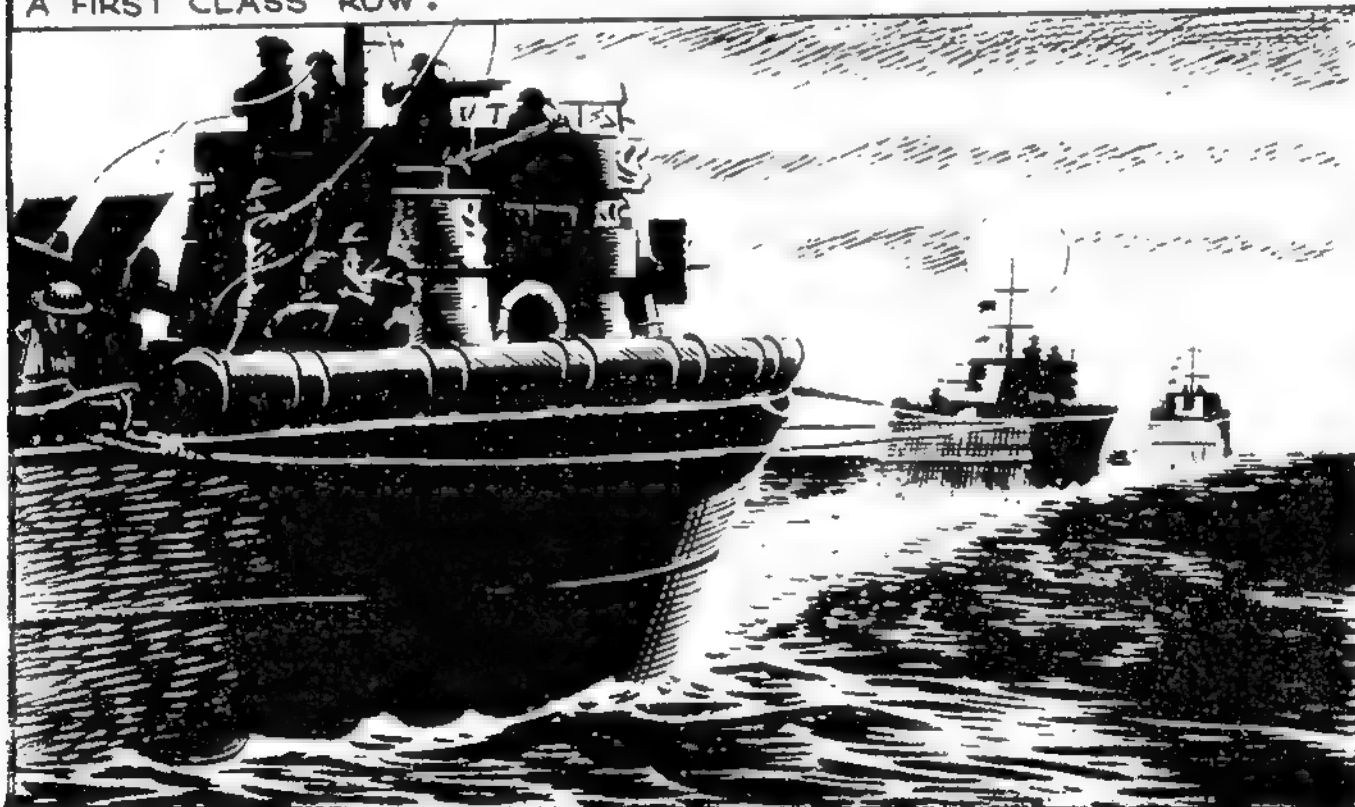
LOOK
LIVELY! I'LL
HAVE TO
TOW YOU
OUT!



AS THEY MADE OFF AT HALF SPEED, FREDDIE AND THE OTHER GUNNERS GAVE A HOT PARTING BURST THAT DISCOURAGED ALL PURSUIT.



GAINING THE OPEN SEA, THEY SET COURSE FOR HOME. IT WAS EASY TO IMAGINE HOW BRACE FELT ABOUT THE ACTION WHICH HAD REDUCED MICHAEL'S BOAT TO A SHAMBLES. CLEARLY THERE WAS GOING TO BE A FIRST CLASS ROW.



NO SOONER WERE THEY BACK THAN BRACE BROUGHT MICHAEL BEFORE CAPTAIN MUIRHEAD.

I NEVER ONCE SAW ANYTHING RESEMBLING THE RAIDER, AND NEITHER DID FENNER, SIR. WE BOTH FEEL THAT MURRAY LED US INTO NEEDLESS TROUBLE THROUGH THIS OBSESSION HE'S GOT ABOUT THIS RAIDER -- WHICH WE ALL KNOW IS SUNK ANYWAY.



MICHAEL REPLIED CALMLY, BUT HE FELT HE WAS LOSING A BATTLE AGAINST BLIND, STUBBORN AUTHORITY.

I STILL FEEL JUSTIFIED, SIR. I MAINTAIN THE RAIDER WAS NEVER SUNK, AND I BELIEVE IT IS HIDING THERE IN THE SEINE ESTUARY UNTIL THE FLAP BLOWS OVER, THEN IT WILL SLIP OUT.



LEFT ALONE WITH HIS COMMANDING OFFICER, MICHAEL RECEIVED SOME FATHERLY ADVICE.

YOU MUST LEARN THE DIFFERENCE, MURRAY, BETWEEN RESOLUTE DASH, WHICH IS WANTED, AND FOOLHARDY RISK OF LIFE, WHICH IS NOT.



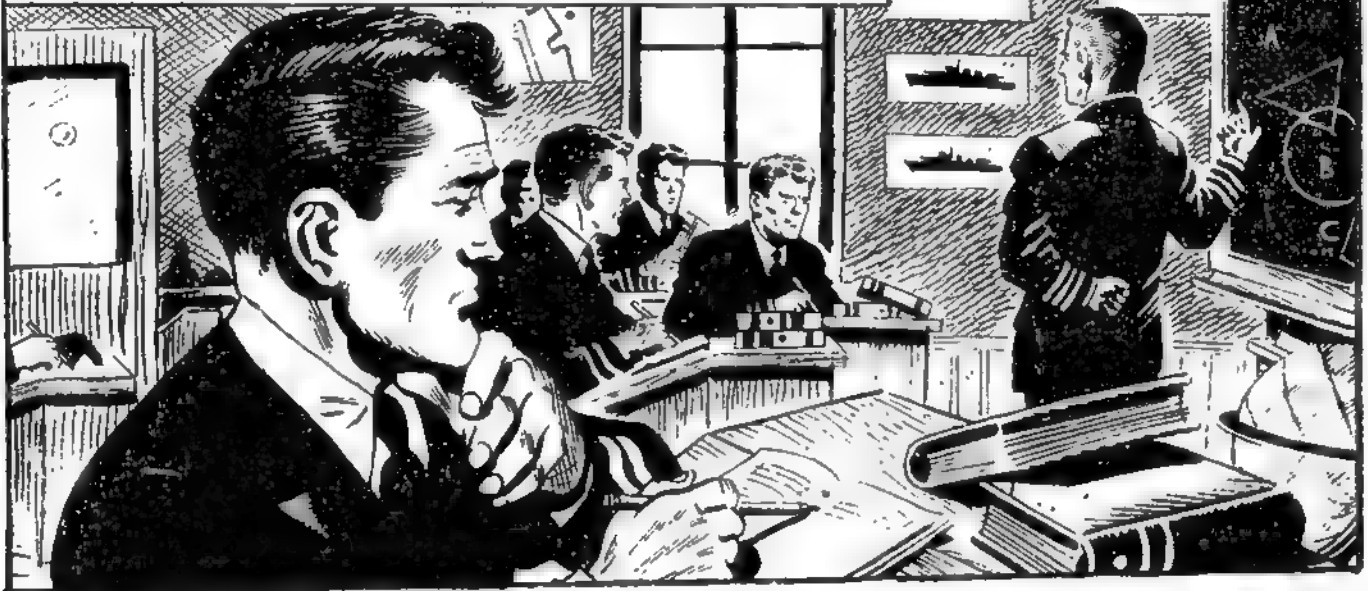
THE CAPTAIN'S NEXT WORDS PLUNGED MICHAEL TO EVEN GLOOMIER DEPTHS.

YOU NEED A REST, AND I'M GOING TO SEND YOU ON A REFRESHER COURSE, TOGETHER WITH YOUR ENTIRE CREW. THERE IS STILL PLENTY TO LEARN.



*Chapter 5.***SHOWDOWN**

MICHAEL AND HIS CREW FOUND THEMSELVES POSTED TO A REFRESHER COURSE FARTHER ALONG THE SOUTH COAST. FOR MICHAEL THIS WAS THE FINAL BLOW. NUMBLY DISPIRITED, HE SQUIRMED UNDER THE RUB OF INJUSTICE. THE ACHE TO PROVE HIMSELF RIGHT KEPT HIM SLEEPLESS.



THERE FOLLOWED A WEEK OF LECTURES, DEMONSTRATIONS AND EXERCISES AT SEA.





THAT AFTERNOON, THE VISIT TO THE OPERATIONS ROOM INTERESTED MICHAEL VERY LITTLE UNTIL, PRESENTLY, A STIR OF EXCITEMENT RIPPLED THROUGH THE QUIET ATMOSPHERE.



THE SENIOR OFFICER STRODE IMPORTANTLY TO THE WALL MAP.

WE HAVE JUST LEARNED, GENTLEMEN, THAT A FAST, MODERN CARGO BOAT HAS SUDDENLY APPEARED JUST OUTSIDE THE SEINE ESTUARY, MAKING FOR THE WEST. IT LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER COMMERCE RAIDER SUCH AS WE SANK THE OTHER NIGHT.



WITH PULSE RACING, MICHAEL WATCHED THE PLOTTING, HIS MIND FILLED WITH EXACTLY THE SAME THOUGHT AS GEORGE REEDHAM'S.



THE CLASS LEFT THE OPERATIONS ROOM AND MICHAEL AND REEDHAM RAN FOR THEIR CAR AS THEY SPED BACK, THEY DETERMINED ON ONE THING -- THEY WERE GOING TO BE IN ON THIS AT ALL COSTS!

I'LL FIX THE ARMING AND REFUELLING, GEORGE. YOU ROUND UP THE CREW. WE'LL PRETEND IT'S FOR THE EXERCISE TONIGHT.



BY LATE AFTERNOON THE CREW HAD ALL REPORTED AND EVERYTHING WAS MADE READY. TO CURIOUS BYSTANDERS MICHAEL EITHER GAVE A TERSE WORD OR A DEAF EAR.

WHAT'S THE FLAP, MURRAY? THE EXERCISE ISN'T TILL NINETEEN HUNDRED HOURS.

JUST A TEST.

MET SAY THE GLASS IS DROPPING AND A GALE IS BLOWING UP. I RECKON THE EXERCISE WILL BE CANCELLED.



OUT OF THE HARBOUR, MICHAEL GOT A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME. WHITE CURLERS WERE SHOWING AND THE WINTRY WIND WAS RISING. BUT HE FORGED ON, OUTWARDLY CALM, BUT INWARDLY TENSE WITH NERVES.

MICHAEL WELCOMED THE SLEET SHOWERS. SO MUCH DEPENDED ON SURPRISE. ONCE SEEN BY THE RAIDER'S GUNS, THEY WERE AS GOOD AS SUNK.



GOING TO HAVE A JOB TO KEEP HER STEADY, SIR!

IT WAS ONLY WHEN MICHAEL DROPPED INTO THE WHEELHOUSE THAT HE WAS REMINDED OF THE GRAVITY OF HIS ACTIONS.



YOU KNOW WE'RE
A COUPLE OF JAIL
BIRDS AFTER THIS,
DON'T YOU?

A YELL FROM A GUNNER BROUGHT
THEM TUMBLING OUT ON DECK...



LOOK,
THERE'S THE
RAIDER!

GARN!
IT'S A
FLIPPING
DESTROYER-
BRITISH!

MICHAEL SWUNG AWAY. IT SEEMED THE
ATTACK FORCE WAS ALREADY ON THE
JOB, AND HE FELT UNREASONABLY
JEALOUS THAT THE OTHERS SHOULD
SHARE IN THE HUNT.



THIS IS FOR
CHOKKER--AND
NOBODY ELSE.

IT WAS A CASE OF SEEING WITHOUT BEING SEEN BY EITHER FRIEND OR FOE. THE GALE WAS BLOWING HARD, PUMPELLING THE GALLANT LITTLE BOAT TILL HER SCREWS THUDDED CLEAR OF THE WATER, THEN SUDDENLY....

THERE! THERE, SIR, ON THE PORT BOW!

BY HEAVENS, YES! IT'S THE RAIDER!

ACTION STATIONS!

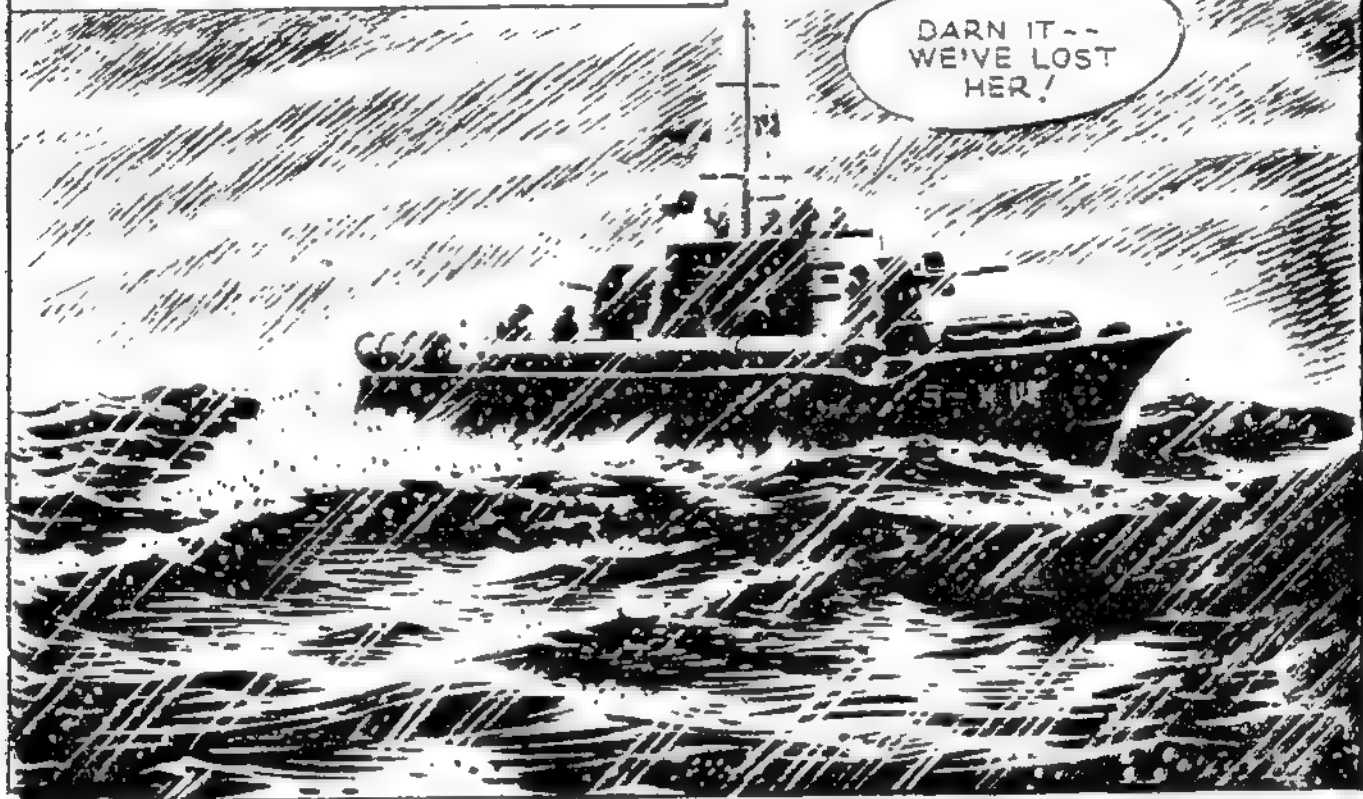
SCORNING THE GREAT WAVES, MICHAEL SLAMMED INTO TOP SPEED AND GAVE CHASE.

HANG ON!



STILL UNDETECTED, THEY WORKED AHEAD OF THE ENEMY, TURNED IN AND THEN COMPLETELY LOST HER IN THE THICKENING WEATHER.

DARN IT--
WE'VE LOST
HER!



THEN ALL AT ONCE THE RAIDER LOOMED UP OUT OF THE MIST.

FIRE
BOTH!

OPEN
FIRE!



Crash Start

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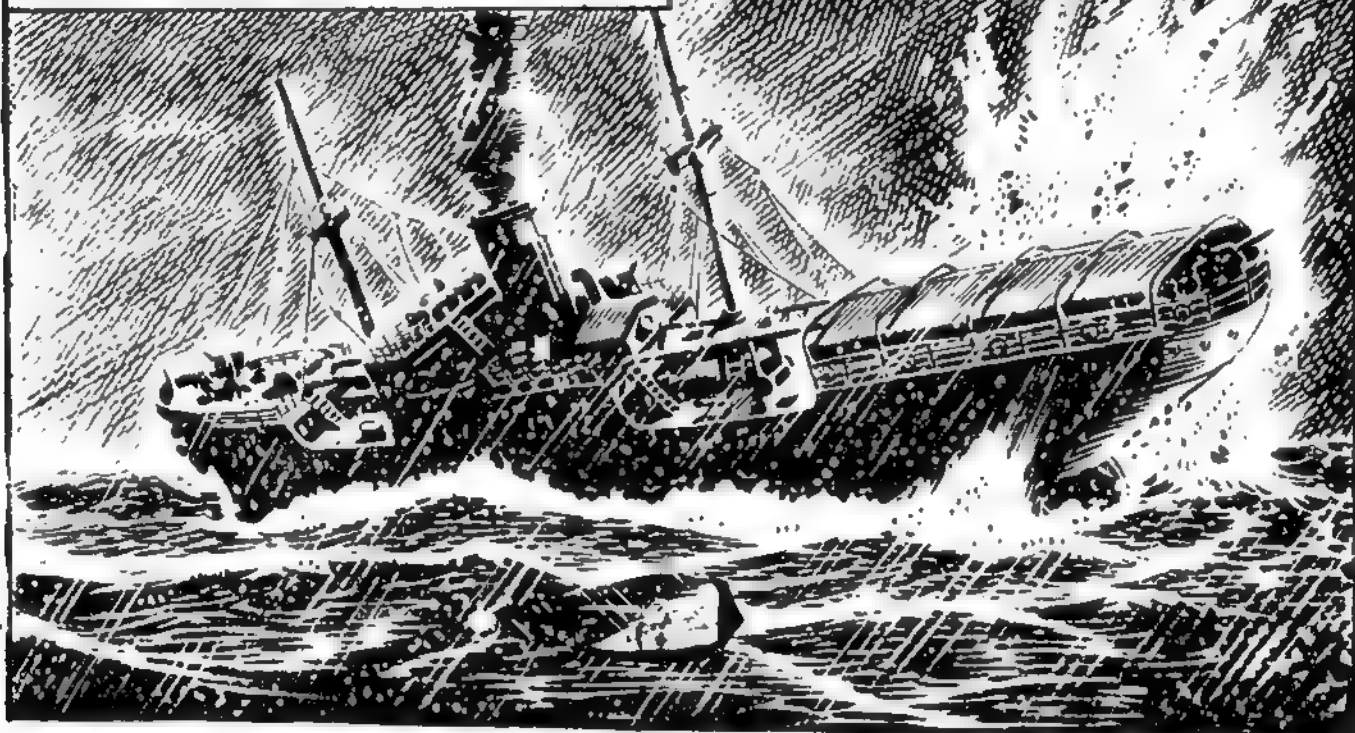
BUT THE EXPECTED EXPLOSION OF MICHAEL'S TORPEDGES NEVER CAME. THE PITCH OF HIS BOAT HAD BEEN TOO STEEP. MICHAEL WRENCHED THE M.T.B. PERILOUSLY ALONGSIDE THE RAIDER -- A SUDDEN DANGEROUS PLAN FLASHING INTO HIS MIND.



SWAMPED BY THE ENEMY'S BOW WAVE, MICHAEL BATTLED ON UNTIL HE WAS JUST AHEAD AND THEN SIGNALLED TO LET GO THE DEADLY DRUM.



THE DEPTH CHARGE ERUPTED IN TIME TO MANGLE THE RAIDER'S PROPELLERS AND STEERING GEAR. AT ONCE THE BIG BOAT BROACHED TO AND BEGAN TO WALLOW HELPLESSLY IN THE HEAVY TROUGHS.



MICHAEL TURNED IN ONCE MORE WITH THE SECOND DEPTH CHARGE AT THE READY. THIS WAS CHOKKER'S OWN TRICK AND WITH IT MICHAEL WAS GOING TO AVENGE HIM. THIS WAS IT! THIS WAS THE SUPREME MOMENT HE HAD BEEN AWAITING.

LET GO
DEPTH
CHARGE!

DEPTH
CHARGE GONE,
SIR!



THERE WOULD BE NO TIME TO GET CLEAR AND MICHAEL KNEW IT. THE SINISTER RUMBLE OF THE DEPTH CHARGE SOUNDED ABOVE THE CRASH OF THE WAVES AND THEN A TERRIFIC ROAR WHICH COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN THE SHIP'S MAGAZINE.



Crash Start

OVERTURNED BY THE BLAST THE M.T.B. SANK IN MINUTES BUT NOT BEFORE THE CREW HAD TIME TO JUMP FOR IT. MEANWHILE THE RAIDER SPLIT APART AND WAS SINKING RAPIDLY. FORTUNATELY THE DESTROYER WHICH MICHAEL HAD SEEN EARLIER CAME STEAMING TO THE RESCUE.



MICHAEL RESCUED A YOUNG GERMAN IN DIFFICULTY, AND THAT SINGLE ACT OF HUMANITY SEEMED TO RELEASE HIM FROM ALL THE OLD SAVAGE BITTERNESS. ALL AT ONCE HE FELT FREE FROM A GREAT BURDEN ... EVEN LIGHT-HEARTED.



RESCUED AND MADE COMFORTABLE WITH THE OTHERS IN THE BRITISH DESTROYER, MICHAEL MET THE RAIDER'S CAPTAIN-- AN UNEXPECTEDLY CHEERFUL LITTLE MAN. EVEN CHOKKER COULD NOT HAVE HATED HIM.

YOU MUST BE CURSING ME, KAPITAN!

NEIN. IF ANYTHING IS TO BE CURSED IT SHOULD BE THIS WAR!

AT THE ENQUIRY ON MICHAEL'S BREACH OF DISCIPLINE, IT WAS ESTABLISHED THAT HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE RAIDER, AND BEARING IN MIND HIS GALLANTRY HE WAS LET OFF WITH A SEVERE REPRIMAND.

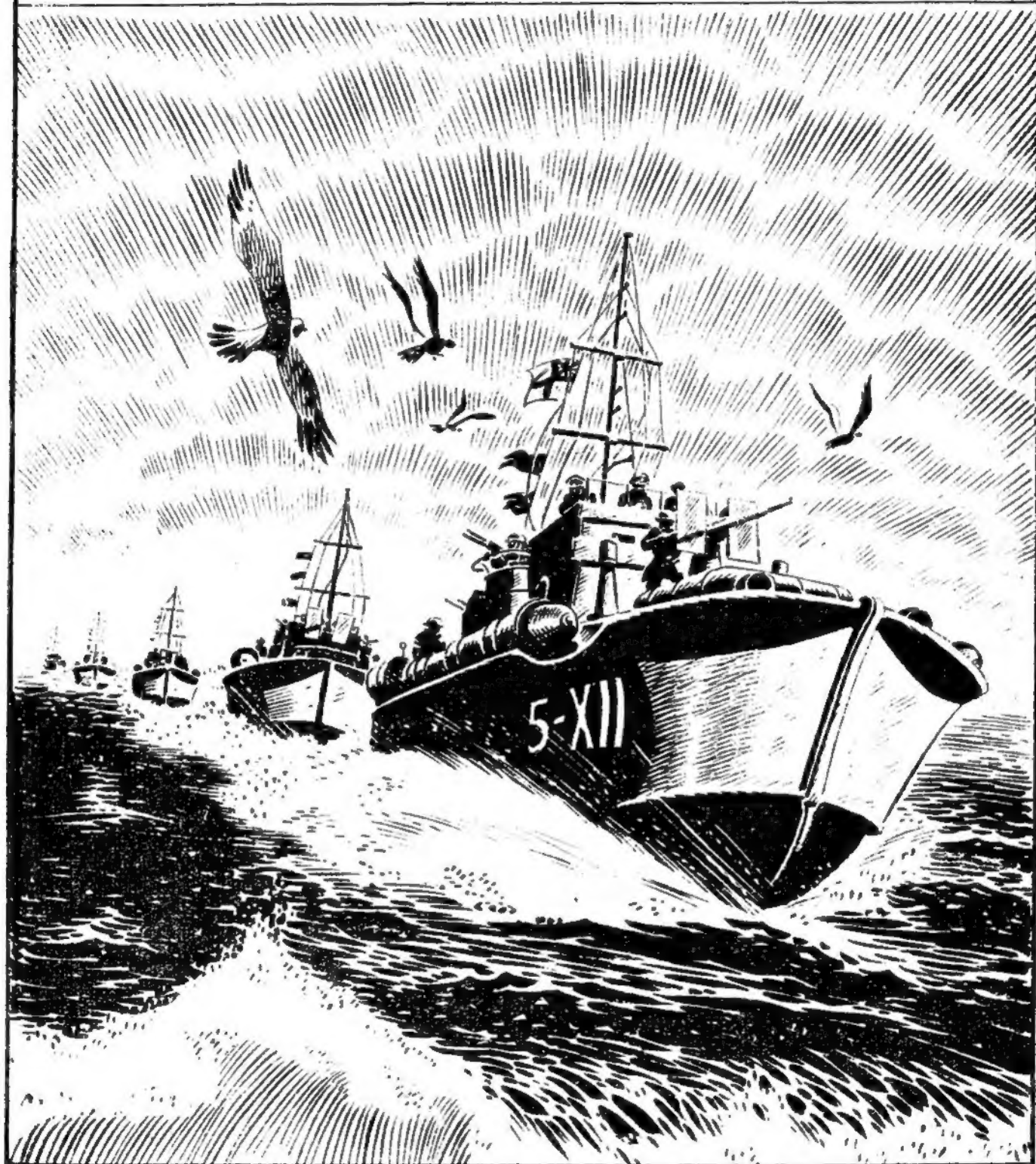
CONSIDER YOURSELF SEVERELY TICKED OFF, LIEUTENANT--AND COME AND CELEBRATE!

GOOD OLD SKIPPER!



Crash Start

MICHAEL EMERGED FROM ALL THIS A NEW MAN, RETURNING TO ACTION AN OLDER AND WISER SAILOR... A DARING LEADER OF THE SPEEDY MOSQUITO NAVY... *THE MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS!*



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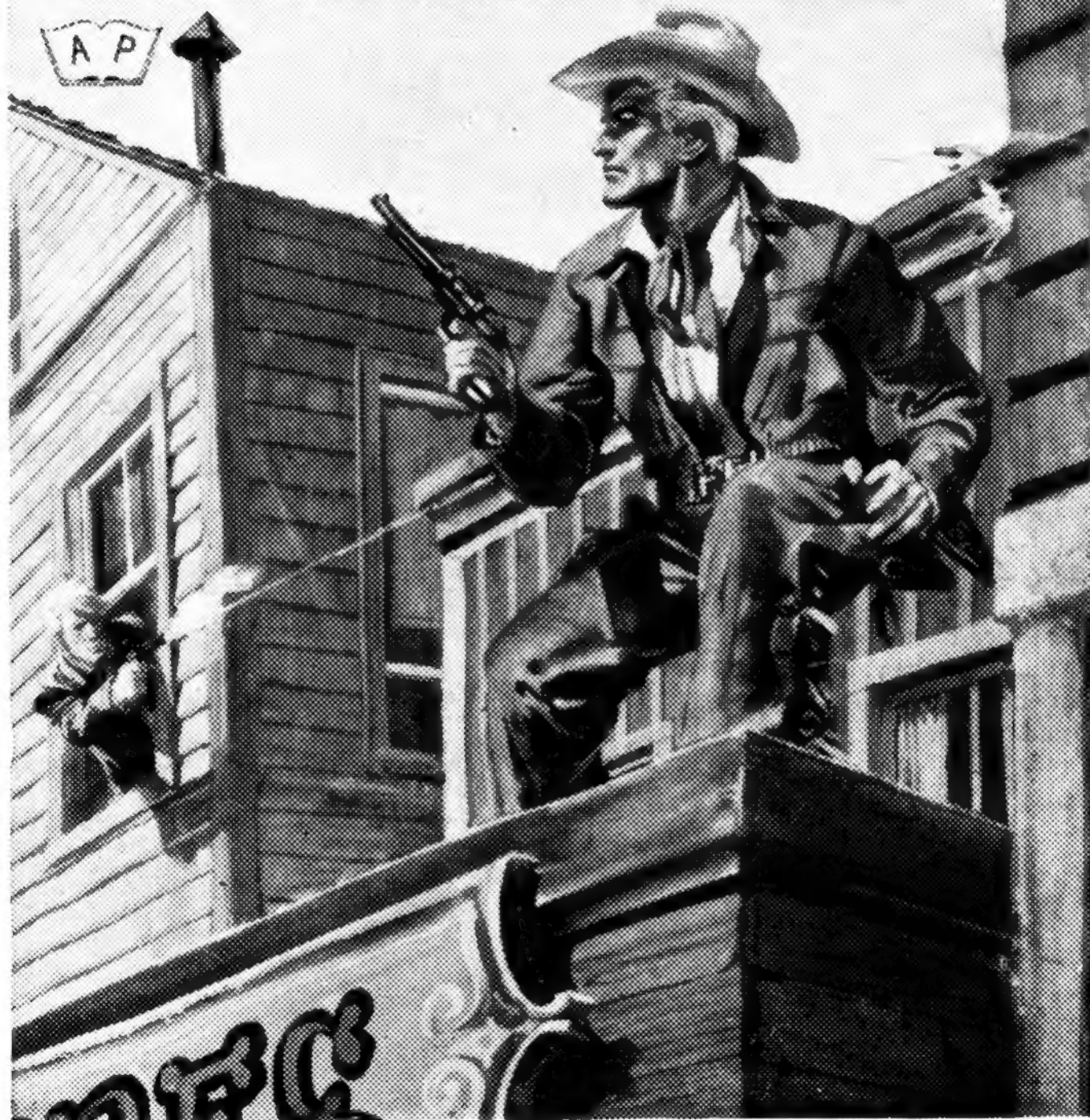
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